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JENNY

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

NOVELS

THE SIN OF ATLANTIS
THE LIVING BUDDHA
THAT FAST MISS BLOUNT
THE NONCONFORMIST PARSON
ISRAEL RANK
BELLAMY THE MAGNIFICENT
LORD CAMMARLEIGH'S SECRET
NIGHTSHADE
THE ROMANCE OF BEAUTY
CAPTIVITY

PLAYS

THE EDUCATION OF ELIZABETH
BELLAMY THE MAGNIFICENT
BILLY'S FORTUNE
AFTER MANY DAYS

In collaboration with Mr. W. J. Loek
IDOLS

JENNY

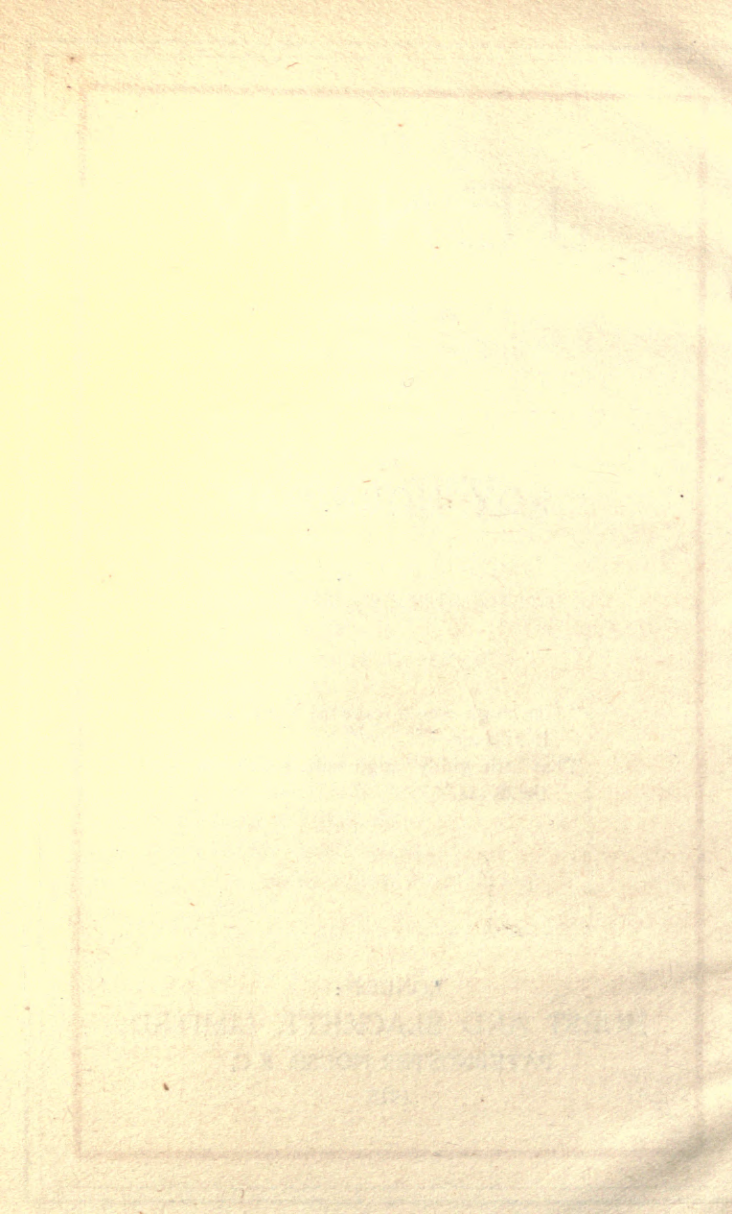
A NOVEL

By

ROY HORNIMAN

“ Her laugh would wake me just as now
it kills me—
That little giddy laugh with which she
thrills me.”

LONDON;
HURST AND BLACKETT, LIMITED
PATERNOSTER HOUSE, E.C.,
1913



JENNY

CHAPTER I

SUCH people as find London dull in August must be without resources of their own. They must be mere puppets worked by the social machinery, with no capacity for stepping outside their strictly conventional mode of life, or for seeing that mass of variety and opportunity for living which lies around them. The month of August to such as really love London is all too short. It passes like a dream—a dream of rest and surcease from contact with those whose perpetual presence has become incapable of furnishing further surprise in the meal of life. To the true lover of London, it is the one month of the year. It breeds a new attitude of mind. The social derelict, whether he be in London of his own choice or from the inability to get away from it, seems to find in it a new city. In a sense, it is a question of mental suggestion, it is like going for a holiday. This may have something to do with the assumption of a straw hat and a blue serge suit, which in themselves constitute a distinct vacation. The

August derelict knows that it would be quite useless to go a-calling, for no one would be at home. With a certain delicious sense of peace, he has visions of his friends either scurrying over the Continent, falling over Alpine precipices, working hard to enjoy themselves at some French watering-place, or striving to persuade themselves that yachting is a pastime which furnishes, after the first two days, anything in the shape of recreation. If the derelict wishes to enjoy himself, he can at his ease, and without hurrying out too early in the morning, mount an omnibus and drive away through miles of fascinating and strange suburbs, procuring amusement, if he be of an observant nature, all through the journey into the heart of Surrey, Middlesex or Hertfordshire. If he can put up with the preliminary horrors of Liverpool Street, a day in Epping is the most select thing imaginable, for he will certainly not meet anyone he knows, and such company as he may come across will have the well-bred ease that is most often to be found amongst the lower classes, and sometimes amongst what are known as the best people.

Even creditors, from one cause or another, seem to agree to a truce, and the ordinary business cares of life remain in a state of suspended animation. To the vast majority, to whom an August holiday out of London has never appeared as even a remote possibility, August is a month which is honoured by taking things more easily than usual, notwithstanding the fact that its tradition as the warmest month of the year is an exploded myth. But even August has its warm days when the heat is tropical and a certain languor of move-

ment and thought overtakes the Londoner, perhaps the more marked because he is usually dressed for a temperature ten degrees lower.

It was the close of a tropical day in August in the year 1878, that Henry Everard left his chambers in Jermyn Street in the cool air of the evening to take a stroll about the streets of London, which possessed for him, as for Doctor Johnson, a greater fascination than anything else in the world. They furnished him with an endless and quiet enjoyment—an enjoyment which, unlike most of the delights of the great City, did not demand a rigorous payment in health and spirits.

Successful novelist and dramatic author, he was kept in London by the rehearsals of a burlesque which, stepping aside from his usual habit of the higher drama, he had written for the Oddities Theatre. He found it considerably more trying to the nerves than his own regular work. The creation of characters of flesh and blood was not the same strain as this interminable and inconsequential arrangement of scenes all made subservient to the glorification of some particular artist. As he set forth on his walk, he cursed for the thousandth time the cupidity which had induced him to accept the burlesque manager's substantial offer instead of following his better judgment and refusing to be drawn into an environment in which he found himself entirely out of the picture, and at the mercy of a manager who, though good-natured enough, regarded his author as of little more importance than a chorus-girl, and certainly of less importance than his stage-manager.

Turning in at the north-west gate of the Green Park, Everard struck across towards Buckingham Palace, picking his way amongst the people who lay about on the grass listening to the band. The strains of the Barcarolle from the *Contes d'Hoffmann* soothed his disturbed nervous system, and by the time he had reached the Mall the irresponsibility of the scene around him had relaxed the feeling of tension, the almost intolerable tension, to which he had been strung up. He walked across the Mall and entered St. James' Park, and, skirting the waters, arrived on the bridge which commands one of the prettiest views in Europe. Seen from this point of vantage, the ugliest palace in the world looks almost poetical, whilst the Foreign Office and Whitehall, behind green trees, and athwart waters dotted with sylvan islets, look like fairyland. Pausing for awhile on the bridge to enjoy with many others a scene which can never pall, he left the Park and struck out through Westminster in the direction of Chelsea Embankment. Old Westminster was then a much more fascinating place than it is now. Thirty years has made all the difference, no doubt with very much advantage to the health of the community. Those who knew it, however, before the hand of reform had swept over it cannot but regret the slums which lay at the back of the Abbey, admitting that of course, from the point of view of morals as well as of health, the change is for the better.

The variety and teeming life of the London slum must always appeal to the mind literary. It is so full of suggestion and subject-matter. On such an

evening as this, when all windows and doors were open, and such of the inhabitants of Dean's Court as were not in the street were hanging out of the windows, it was a sight full of animation. Everard stood watching it with intense interest, not a detail of it escaping him. There was the fat woman with Hogarthian and ill-covered bust hanging out of her casement and shouting pleasantries to the thin, over-clothed woman opposite, who was watering a little row of dusty geraniums out of a broken jug, heedless of the fact, till a scream of hideous remonstrance arose from below, that most of the water was descending upon the occupants of the doorstep. Up against the begrimed blank wall at the end of the court, which made it a *cul de sac*, a crowd of boys was gathered, one of their number patiently tossing a ball at a little pattern marked on the ground. Suddenly, with a wild cry of excitement, they would scatter, and a boy would pick up the ball and fling it violently at one of his companions. Then the mystery of the game was complete, except for the inevitable squabble which accompanied every point scored and which had to be adjusted before the game could be proceeded with. To an acute observer there was a singularity about the assemblage in Dean's Court which a psychologist would have detected with amusement. There were middle-aged men and women, young married folk, old people, babies, and boys and girls of all ages, but the youth and the maiden were scarce. They were away in the parks and gardens, or in secluded nooks, learning lessons in life.

As Everard, having taken in the scene, was about

to move down a short cut to where the river was indicated by a small plantation of masts above the Embankment, a man and a boy with a barrel-organ came to a full stop a few yards down the court, and struck up an infectious dance tune. In a minute the place was alive with dancers. The girls, taking it as a serious business, formed themselves into little rows facing each other, and advanced and receded with that preternatural gravity which only the English dancer wears. The boys danced irregularly, breaking off every now and then to perform some piece of horse-play, or to disturb some girl in her terpsichorean exercises. Now and then a middle-aged man and woman with self-conscious laughter would advance and do a few steps, loudly encouraged by their contemporaries, returning breathless to the pavement after a very short experiment.

Everard possessed a gift, and a gift which is very much rarer than is supposed. He could detect the exceptional in physical beauty and personal fascination. It is true that most people can detect this when it is in its proper environment, well-placed, well-posed, and receiving its due of attention and recognition. But Everard could detect these qualities in their potential stage. Two years before, returning home one night from the Borough, he had walked into a cheap tobacconist's for a light for his cigarette. He had seen a raw youth behind the counter, and had at once recognized that he had an exceptional physique for a certain line of part. This youth was now the Antinous of the stage, playing poetical juveniles as if he had been born and nursed in a centre of breeding

and culture. Everard had also discovered Irma Charteris—probably the best pathetic actress of her time. He had met her as a nursery-governess in a remote country-house, and had heard her read a fairy story to her pupils. He had many other remarkable discoveries to his credit.

As he watched the dancers, he noticed a girl of about sixteen come out of a little side courtyard with a skipping-rope in her hand. She stepped into the middle of the court and began to skip in time to the music. Her dancing was not particularly good, although her manipulation of the skipping-rope was certainly clever, and must have been the result of a great deal of practice. At first she danced with her back to him, and he was struck by the delicacy of her physique. The fineness of her ankles and the smallness of her hands and feet were at once noticeable, while the black hair which hung in glossy curls to her shoulders suggested, together with the poise of her head, a class different from that of the children by whom she was surrounded. Automatically, as he watched, she turned in her dancing and faced him.

“Good lord, she *is* pretty!” he murmured, with a strong emphasis on the verb. He watched her, fascinated, noticing that by degrees the other dancers stopped to watch her also. The more he looked the more he became aware of her exceptional quality in all those respects of which he could judge without having spoken to her. Not precisely putting the fact to himself, he marked that she possessed that particular attribute of unconsciousness which belongs to those who are born with the power of commanding attention

and admiration. She was finally the only person left dancing, and gave no sign that she was aware of the fact.

"Go it, Jenny!" screeched a boy with red hair, pale face and gleaming green eyes, adding to a companion, as Jenny for the hundredth time twisted her skipping-rope into a coil above her head: "She ain't missed one yet. Ain't she — lovely?" The conjunction of the oath with the adjective was superb in its sincerity and innocence.

At that moment a woman came out of a house close by with a basket on her arm. Jenny, seeing her, and as if it were part of the dance, wound the rope round her wrist with a flourish, and, passing from her steps to a walk, came along with her towards Everard. As they passed, Everard listened eagerly for her voice. Had it been coarse and of the gutter there would have been a certain bizarre attraction in the combination of extreme beauty and commonness. It was almost with a sigh of relief that he heard her speaking in a light, musical contralto. She passed him without seeming to be aware that someone very distinguished in comparison to those around was watching her attentively. As for that, Everard was a distinguished-looking person in whatever society he might be—he had that supreme consciousness of his own apartness which is peculiar to some people, and carries with it no suggestion of affectation. As the girl passed she broke into a laugh. It was then that the full measure of her fascination dawned on Everard. His instinct on first catching sight of her had been

perfectly true ; she was the exceptional in all respects. In another minute she had disappeared down a side-street with her companion, and the children of the court, as if it had been a real Court, and the restraining presence of Royalty removed, took up the dance again with renewed vigour.

Everard went on his way, reflecting deeply. Ideas which he could not quite formulate were striving for cohesion in his brain. The sudden seeing of this girl meant something for him, and he could not for the moment define what it was. She had been sent, not for him—he saw that clearly enough—but she was to be in his life. “How? how?” he kept on asking himself. Suddenly, having passed Chelsea Bridge and being in a quiet spot on the Embankment, with the opal river flowing beside him, he paused as if further movement were impossible till he had solved the problem. Opposite to him was Battersea Park, a long, low line of foliage, growing more solid and black with the coming of night. A silent file of barges was slipping mysteriously down the river, on which still lay a faint touch of green and silver. He was thinking how all things had their complement ; the night itself was in the light contralto stage, later its voice would become deeper, but at present it matched the raven hair, pale face and peculiar voice of the girl with the skipping-rope. Suddenly he started, realizing what he wanted of her.

In his innocence—or rather, because he was quite incapable of taking the point of view of the manager for whom he was working—he had created of “Morgiana” in *The Forty Thieves*, quite a distinct, artistic character. The part

had barely a dozen lines, but it required a girl of great and child-like beauty to speak them. The manager regarded Everard's view on the subject as being of no importance. He had offered him his choice of half a dozen golden-haired banalities, all of whom Everard had objected to. Finally he had forced on him a plump, red-haired maiden, beloved of the gallery and the stalls, and all Everard's objections to her had been overruled. That very morning she had been absent from rehearsal, sending a note to say that she had consented to honour a wealthy young stock-broker with her hand and heart, and that, of course, she must now think of her new position, and the social dignity required of her. She added, what was no doubt a source of intense delight to her, that if they declined to cancel her contract, her future husband was quite well off enough to pay any damages which might be considered fair. The manager swore and returned a curt answer that such damages as would be considered fair were not worth mentioning, putting into greater verbiage Everard's comment that she obviously owed him five shillings.

Everard, secretly delighted, recommenced his tactics of objecting to everyone, in the faint hope that the right person would come along. Undoubtedly the girl with the skipping-rope was the absolute creature he wanted, and somehow he had a conviction that, in spite of all that might be said against it, she would be able to do what was wanted. She was inexperienced enough to surmount the difficulties; for on the stage more than

elsewhere a little knowledge is a dangerous thing. Yet, sure as he was, and enthusiastically as his brain had accepted the idea, the reaction came, and he grew depressed at the difficulties which he saw ahead. He would be scoffed at for even thinking of picking a child out of a slum and putting it before a London audience—and a West-End audience at that—in a leading part. He racked his brain for a precedent, and could not think of one. Even the find in the tobacconist's shop had undergone months of hard drilling, and Irma Charteris had been sent into the provinces to learn the A B C of her work. But this child had something which neither of them had possessed. He wondered if his susceptibility, with him as largely artistic as it was physical, had blinded him to certain shortcomings which would be obvious to the purely commercial mind.

Later he turned his steps towards Piccadilly, and ate a light supper at one of the large restaurants. Looking round at the women and girls present, and keeping a severely critical mind at work, he was still able to maintain that either his memory was playing him false or that the girl with the skipping-rope was really a great beauty.

By the next morning, assisted by the sobering sensations of the breakfast-hour, he had almost dismissed the idea from his mind. He took his way to rehearsal, prepared, with a sigh of resignation, to accept the substitute who would be suggested by the manager—a substitute who would, no doubt, give him absolute neuralgia.

By the time he had reached the stage door he had quite determined to put the extravagant notion of the evening before out of his mind. During that tedious waste of time, however, which seems inseparable from all things theatrical, and which invariably precedes nine rehearsals out of ten, he found himself discussing the matter with the manager.

Now with all his defects, Mr. Jack Howard was essentially a big man, and eminently receptive of new ideas. He did not make the mistake of smaller people and dwell upon the secondary difficulties of any scheme until they had become insuperable and primary objections. When Everard mentioned Irma Charteris and the tobacconist's assistant, he determined at any rate to see the girl, but with the tact—some described it as heartlessness—for which he was notorious, he forbore to tell the substitute who was to read the part that she would only play it if they could not get somebody better. Everard and Howard lunched together, and afterwards, having sent in a note to the stage manager to continue the rehearsal without them, they took a cab and told the man to drive in the direction of Westminster. The burlesque manager had reasons for not being entirely sceptical. He was accustomed to see young ladies of the humblest beginnings blossom into affluence. Some did it fairly well, some did it badly, very few did it superlatively; still, his standard was not as high as Everard's. He had not conceived the creature of rare distinction, the tropical bird on its lonely spray, who was Everard's ideal. They rattled past the Abbey,

lying like a huge grey pachyderm in the intense heat. Arrived at Dean's Court, the manager manœuvred his great bulk out of the cab and looked round curiously.

"She must be something wonderful if she can rise superior to this," he said, in a voice which had always a suggestion of complaint in it. Adopting something the manner of street singers, they walked slowly down the centre of the court, looking from right to left, and ever and anon at the windows above, as if they expected to have pennies thrown them.

"These have been good houses in their time," said the manager, always with the note of complaint in his voice, "and," he added, "they'd be good houses still if it wasn't for the people in them."

Half a dozen or so very small children accompanied them in their walk to the end of the court, as if they were a show and might be expected to begin at any moment. Indeed, there was a certain similarity in bulk between the manager and a gentleman who was in the habit of visiting the court periodically, the custom of the gentleman in question being rapidly to divest himself of a light great-coat, and produce a small square of carpet on which he would twist himself into extraordinary positions, ranging from one resembling a toast-rack to a very nearly perfect imitation of a tea-pot, capping the entertainment by breaking a solid bar of iron across his knee. Expectant of these delights, the children kept a fixed glance on Everard's companion.

"Do you see her?" said the manager, turning

to Everard as if he suspected the girl they had come in search of to be a creature of the other's imagination.

"No."

"What shall we do? I don't much fancy a house-to-house visit. I shall look well going from door to door asking for the girl with the fine eyes at my time of life, shan't I?" He gave a loud laugh, which so delighted an infant at his feet that she answered it with a shrill cackle of enjoyment. The only effect of this duet was that the head of a slatternly woman was thrust out of a third-story window. Amazed at seeing two middle-aged gentlemen standing in the court with apparently no object whatever, she arranged herself in a comfortable position and remained leaning out to await further developments. Howard turned to Everard for some suggestion, but Everard had none to make. Suddenly he clutched Howard's arm.

"There she is!"

A little figure in a skirt many sizes too large for her, and with a loaf in a piece of newspaper under her arm, was advancing towards them.

"Good lord!" exclaimed the manager. "You don't mean to say that——?"

"Yes, I do. Wait till you see her face." By this time the girl was passing them, and the manager placed himself in her path. Surprised, perhaps a little frightened, she glanced up at him. Even the most fearless inhabitant of such a district has a bogey in the shape of detectives and police officers. For a moment Howard was surprised into silence. Telling the story afterwards—and of course it lost nothing in the telling—he

always declared that his first impulse had been to say: "You little dear!" and his second to do what he did, which was to take off his hat. Then they stood looking at the girl, and the girl stood looking at them.

"Where do you live, my dear?"

She looked at the burly form above her, and a faint smile rose like a background behind her puzzled expression.

"At number eight."

"Have you got a father and mother?"

"My mother's dead, and my father drinks."

Everard detected at once the peculiar use of the possessive pronoun, which rounded off her remark and made it sound so different from the usual formula.

"And what do you do?"

The puzzled expression grew stronger and a certain mistrust gathered in her eyes. It was obvious that she thought she was being questioned with no friendly intent, and she answered with growing reserve: "I'm in service."

Everard glanced down at the skirt and wondered what kind of house it was that could afford a servant and tolerate such a garment.

"I saw you dance yesterday with your skipping-rope," he said.

This was more alarming than ever; they had evidently been watching her.

Mr. Howard grasped the fact that they must find out some responsible person with whom they could deal.

"Is your father at home?"

"No, he's round at the 'bus stables, or"—she

paused doubtfully—"he may be in the public-house."

"Is that his tea?"

"No, that's Mrs. Goodchild's bread. I always have my tea with her." The presence of aitches was bewildering.

"Who's Mrs. Goodchild?"

The girl looked as if that were a question quite beyond her power of answering, but she thought for a moment, and then said: "I stay with her when father's drunk." Then she pulled herself together with a certain decision and walked past them, disappearing into the smaller courtyard from which Everard had seen her emerge the day before.

"What do you think of her?"

"Well, she's one of the prettiest girls I've ever seen. There's nothing flashy or common about her. And what a sweet voice; it's like music—it's like a 'cello. Let's go and see this Mrs. Goodchild."

The children, who had watched the conversation between the two men and Jenny, had by this time come to the conclusion that from the point of view of entertainment Everard and his companion were a couple of impostors. They retired to a doorstep some way off, where they could survey possible developments without the fatigue of standing up. At the disappearance of Everard and Howard into the smaller courtyard they stampeded across the road and stood in the entrance.

The court in which Howard and Everard found themselves was an extraordinary place, and seemed

to have no rhyme or reason for its existence. It formed a square, surrounded with squat, delapidated tenement houses. The two men, again at a loss, stood looking round, when they caught sight of Jenny's scared face at a window opposite.

"There she is!" They made for the door and knocked. It was opened by a woman very different from what might have been expected in such a neighbourhood. Poorly dressed, there was yet a refinement about her which was unmistakable. The hair, that barometer of class, was done neatly, and everything about her was strictly clean. Even as he looked at her, Everard felt that she required explaining. She possessed the remains of considerable beauty, which not even a certain wateriness of the eyes and the too high colouring of the cheeks could hide. The mouth was strong and firm—almost too firm, as if its rigid compression was the result of a perpetual appeal to her strength of will. Everard's keen perception where individuals were concerned at once carried him to a conclusion with regard to her. "Has been a drunkard and has got over it," he said to himself. There was defiance in the woman's manner, and obvious distrust in her glance. She only held the door open sufficiently to be able to speak to them, and was evidently ready to answer in no very friendly manner. Everard saw that the thing to do was to come to the point at once.

"We believe you can give us some information about the little girl who came in here?"

"What information?"

Everard proceeded. "The fact of the matter is, this gentleman is Mr. Howard, the manager of the Oddities Theatre. I am the author of his new piece. That little girl has precisely the appearance we want for a certain part. I saw her dance yesterday, and I believe that she is so peculiarly fascinating that she could be made quite a success."

Everard had been led on to lay the whole matter before her, grasping, as he proceeded, that she was quite able to follow and understand what he was talking about. When he had finished Mr. Howard murmured, "That's it, that's it," in a voice palpitating with apparent injury.

The woman stood looking at them with contracted brows. It was obviously too great a proposition to be settled off-hand, and she was at a loss to know what to do. Everard was not a man to whom it was possible to be rude, and the manner of both the men was too courteous and deferential for offence to be taken. Jenny, listening over the banisters, caught the words "dancing" and "yesterday," and wondered what she had done that she should be thus hunted down. To her horror and amazement, instead of hearing Mrs. Goodchild give the strangers a bit of her mind and shut the door in their faces, she heard her ask them to step upstairs.

Mrs. Goodchild was between two difficulties: she was either compelled to discuss the matter before a growing audience in the court, or to invite the strangers into her own apartment, which might breed grave scandal in the minds of the purists of Little Dean's Court. She chose the latter, and risked the damage to her character.

The men stumbled up the little dark staircase, and almost fell into a room in front, surprisingly light, pleasant and clean. It was a bed-sitting-room, and the furniture was scanty. A small island of carpet lay in the centre of the well-scrubbed boards. On a deal table in the middle of the room was a pile of sewing on which the woman had been engaged. The walls were bare of pictures, and there was no ornament of any kind except a small, cheap clock on the mantelpiece and a couple of vases, which, though inexpensive enough, could not have been chosen by a person with a common mind.

They found Jenny in retreat behind the bed, with a considerable look of fright in her eyes. Mrs. Goodchild at once reassured her.

"There's nothing to be frightened about, Jenny; these gentlemen don't want to harm you. Won't you sit down?"

She indicated two chairs for the men, and seated herself without any apology for the poor-ness of her dwelling. With all her apparent firm-ness of mind, there was a certain hesitancy about her movements, as in the case of those who have recently recovered from some shattering illness.

"Her father," she began, "is an ostler. Good-hearted and kind to her in his way, except when he's under the influence of drink."

"Would it be of any use discussing the matter with him?"

"I am afraid he is rather beyond discussions. He can just do his work, but it is more by force of habit than anything else."

The more they talked the matter over with this woman, the more puzzled Everard grew as to who and what she could possibly be. She furnished no clue beyond the fact that not once did she utter the least excuse for the circumstances by which she was surrounded. After a minute or two, she took up her work and went on sewing. "You must excuse me, but my time is very valuable," she said in explanation.

When they had put the whole matter before her, with all its obvious advantages to Jenny, who sat on the edge of the bed quite reassured, though not fully comprehending a discussion that was so vital to her, the woman paused for a moment in her work and looked at them squarely. "There is another side."

"Quite so," said Everard gently.

"And a side," continued Mrs. Goodchild, "which would be particularly dangerous where there is no very responsible guardian."

"There's yourself?" suggested Mr. Howard, who had not contributed much to the discussion, but was eminently interested.

There was a long pause. The woman bent her head and went on sewing. Everard judged by certain evidences that her silence was dictated as much by a rush of feeling as by reflection on what Howard had said.

"I have no manner of right to control her actions," she answered at last. "Besides, although I have had a good deal to do with her, and I have done what I can for her, she is of a very decided nature. One hardly realizes her firmness, because she rarely argues."

"How old is she?"

"Nearly seventeen. I don't think you need consider the father, except to get his formal consent in case she should like the idea."

"Then you don't entirely disapprove?" said Everard.

Mrs. Goodchild turned to the girl and held out a few coppers. "Jenny dear, would you mind running down the street and getting some sugar?"

Jenny came from behind the bed, took the money and disappeared. Mrs. Goodchild then spoke rapidly, as if anxious to lay the whole case before them during her absence.

"This girl, you must understand, is not innocent, she is pure." Here she hesitated, as if seeking for an appropriate description. "She is a Diana of the slums."

"And very nice too," said the manager plaintively, by no means clear as to the full application of the phrase, but hazily feeling that it was meant as a compliment to Jenny. He shook his head slowly and approvingly, with the air of a great moralist whose ideals had been particularly realized. Everard was struck by the peculiarity of so unexpected a description; then for the first time he noticed a certain little row of books on a table at the further side of the bed. Even from where he sat, he could see that they were select volumes, the essence of a life of reading.

"'Diana of the slums.' What a name for a comedy! It ought to come in useful for you, Everard," wailed Howard.

"If she remains where she is," Mrs. Goodchild resumed, "she has one of two courses open to

her—to go into service, or to marry one of these young men that one sees about here.” Then she put down her work and thought very deeply. “It has been a pleasure to me to educate her beyond her surroundings. Sometimes I think I’ve done wrong. She is extraordinarily quick”—then she paused again, her brows contracting more and more. “I think there is a fate about these things, don’t you?” she said, turning more especially to Everard. “One can’t account for it. To be frank, I don’t believe she will stay in her own class of life, whatever course is taken. With her beauty she will run risks, and—yes, I think it will be wiser for her to take this chance. She has the advantage, or disadvantage, I don’t know which it is, of having seen most of the dreadful object-lessons that vice can afford. There is one person I should like you to consult, though,” she went on quickly, “and that is Father Hawthorne, the Vicar of St. Aloysius. He will at once put his finger on the right spot. He is one of the broadest-minded men I have ever met.”

“The father is a cypher, I take it?” said Everard.

“Absolutely. He will do whatever is suggested, and be only too glad of a few shillings a week from her earnings. Will you go and see Father Hawthorne at once? I won’t say anything further to her till you’ve spoken to him.”

“We will go at once,” said Everard, and they rose.

“One moment,” said Mrs. Goodchild, as they reached the door. “Supposing she is a failure. She will have been introduced to a class of life for

which she is unfitted, and then you see she may seize at any means to keep herself there."

But here Mr. Howard stepped in. He had made up his mind that he wanted Jenny. He now fully grasped Everard's idea of Morgiana as a little maid-of-all-work, dressed almost like a child, in a pinafore. He had retained his position as an enormously successful manager precisely because he was always guided by his first impressions, and those first impressions had never ceased to be the impressions of the boy in the gallery. If he heard a tune which pleased him he did not stop to analyse it, nor did he ask himself whether his judgment was likely to be belittled because the tune was of the cheapest. As it pleased him, he was sure it would please the people for whom he catered. He had arrived at the pitch of wanting Jenny, and he was determined to have her.

"My dear lady," he moaned, "you don't imagine any harm's going to come to a dear little girl like that?" He waved a fat hand of horror at the mere suggestion.

"If you catch a girl of that age and put her in front, she'll always make a success of some kind, and if she isn't the catch-on we expect, we'll have her taught to sing and dance and give her a nice little part in the next piece." His voice undulated with emotion and apparent sincerity. Emma Goodchild, despite a keen instinct for character, was quite carried away by this big boy, who looked at her with large, humid blue eyes as his imagination roved over the future it would be his pleasure and joy to prepare for Jenny. Had she had any suspicion of the endless succession of promising

girls who had been hoisted into prominence, and placed on the pinnacles of notoriety, only to be pushed into the abyss when the vantage-point was wanted for somebody else, she would have been horrified.

"She'll be all right," he complained, as he descended the stairs. "She'll be all right," he added, like the echo of a sob, as he made his exit into the court.

Emerging into the larger street in Westminster, they met Jenny, whose face broke into a delicious smile as she passed. Mr. Howard was by this time taking a leading part in the proceedings, and looked upon Mrs. Goodchild and the priest as superfluities in the transaction. He stopped and planted himself in Jenny's way.

"Have you ever been to a theatre, my dear?"

"No, but I've been to a music-hall."

"Did you like it?"

"Yes, it was lovely."

"How would you like to go on and do the same sort of thing—sing and dance?"

Jenny's eyes opened wide. "I don't know," she said.

"Well, think it over, my dear, think it over." He patted her head, looking the picture of benevolence, and, to do him justice, feeling it.

They went on their way to the Reverend Father's dwelling. They fortunately found Father Hawthorne at home, sitting in a bare, refectory-like room, robed in his cassock, and drinking a cup of afternoon coffee while smoking a cigarette. He listened to what they had to say, and did not take long to make up his mind.

"I quite agree with Mrs. Goodchild that she will not remain where she is, and that this is not a chance that should be thrown away." He was much impressed by the stately benevolence of Mr. Howard, who had a way of sympathizing with another person's point of view which was very ingratiating. "Shall I see her father for you?" he asked, leaning back in his chair, and putting the tips of his long, delicate fingers together.

Mr. Howard's extraordinary instinct led him to explain early in the interview that he was a Roman Catholic, and he addressed the Anglican cleric as Father with a ready and tactful recognition of Anglican orders.

"Oh, don't trouble." Mr. Howard had already made up his mind as to the best way of dealing with Jenny's parent, and Father Hawthorne quite endorsed Mrs. Goodchild's opinion that there would be no difficulty in that direction.

"Mrs. Goodchild could buy her a few clothes, I suppose?" said Mr. Howard.

The priest looked at him keenly, but for a moment he made no reply.

"One hardly expects to meet a woman like her in such surroundings," said Everard tentatively.

"Mrs. Goodchild is a woman for whom I have the highest respect," said the priest.

Everard and Howard both waited, expecting him to go on. They were intensely interested in Mrs. Goodchild, in connection with whom they had both sensed the same feeling of mystery. If they expected the priest to satisfy their curiosity, they were very much mistaken. He did nothing of the kind, but said slowly :

"Yes, I think Mrs. Goodchild is quite to be trusted."

Everard, with his ready imagination, which, if at times it carried him far in advance of facts, led him as often to the absolute truth, wondered whether Father Hawthorne might not have had something to do with her reclamation. He had got it firmly into his head that she was a gentlewoman who had come down in the world through drink. As they rose, Mr. Howard produced a five-pound note. "As I have possibly got a find in one of your parishioners, Father," he said, "may I contribute five pounds towards helping the poor of your parish?" His voice quavered with pathos, as with a certain stateliness he placed the note on the table.

Father Hawthorne was touched, and said gently: "I will take it in the spirit in which it is given."

From the priest's house, they returned to Mrs. Goodchild. They found her and Jenny at tea. Mr. Howard declared that if he could be provided with a cup, he should enjoy it very much.

"Now, my dear," said Mr. Howard, "this gentleman saw you dance and thought you had got the right sort of idea for what we wanted. We'll rehearse you to-morrow, and if we think you can do what we want, you'll play this part. I'll give you five pounds a week for the first month, and a two years' contract at fifteen pounds a week afterwards."

"Suppose you don't want her for this part after all?" asked Mrs. Goodchild.

"She can stay on at two pounds a week as a pretty girl, and we'll teach her to do something."

Jenny had no views about money at all. She could count in twopences, but she had very seldom been called upon to do anything else, so the magnificent offer passed, as it were, over her head.

"She can't go to rehearsal as she is," said Mrs. Goodchild.

Mr. Howard produced a pocket-book and took out four five-pound notes. "I don't know whether you can afford the time, but if you'll spend fifteen of that in making the little girl presentable——"

Mrs. Goodchild took the money.

Everard liked the complete lack of servility with which she accepted her part in the scheme. As she was about to put the money into a small purse, she paused.

"We haven't really asked Jenny's consent," she said with a smile, as she turned to the girl. "Jenny, do you quite understand what is suggested?"

The child, for she was little more, rose and went over to her friend. "Yes, I think so," she said with a smile, and in a voice from which all shyness seemed suddenly to have vanished. "They want me to sing and dance, like those people at the music-hall. You remember—when I went with Ginger?"

"Ginger's a great friend of hers," explained Mrs. Goodchild; "and he's a very nice boy. We're very fond of him, aren't we, Jenny?"

"He's all right." The phrase was typical of her slum education. The young people of the class among whom she lived very seldom gave enthusiastic expression to their likes and dislikes.

When they say that he or she is "all right" it speaks volumes.

"And you think you'll like it?"

"Yes, if you're with me, not unless."

This brought them to the point which they had all ignored. The girl couldn't go on living where she was, and she must be looked after. To launch a child of her age upon the world without a guardian of some kind was out of the question. Howard and Everard knew, of course, that there were hundreds of people who would have been only too glad to look after her for a consideration, but would they be the right people, and how was the right person to be found? The very best people for the position would be those who, of course, would have nothing to do with it. If Mrs. Goodchild would not help them, it was difficult to say where they were to look next; yet, poor as was the living she was making, it was quite evident that she could not be asked to give it up for something which would have no certainty of permanence. Mr. Howard would have had no objection to offering her some post in the theatre, as an under housekeeper, or an assistant wardrobe-mistress, or anything which would give him an excuse for using her in the way he desired. But somehow, he felt this was not the proper way to approach her. Everard, on his side, came to the conclusion that if she were living here out of sight of the world, however poor she might be, there must be a good reason for it, and he felt it might be difficult to move her.

"I will see that you are started, Jenny," said Mrs. Goodchild, "but I am afraid——"

"If you don't come, I shan't go. If I'm not to be with you, I don't want it."

Howard was secretly delighted. He saw that this was bound to play into their hands. Mrs. Goodchild looked intensely troubled, but evidently hardly knew what to say. She did not attempt to argue with the girl, and Everard saw that her point of view had been right, and that it would have been useless. Decision was the dominant note in the girl's character.

Mrs. Goodchild's hesitation was a long one. She had clearly no desire to accept the position, and if she did so, the men felt it would be out of a wish not to stand in Jenny's way. At last she raised her eyes and looked at Everard and Howard.

"Very well, I will help to the best of my ability."

They shook hands with Mrs. Goodchild and Jenny, and went away, stumbling down the dark stairs.

"I wonder," said Everard, as they once more stood in the sunlit court, "whether we have allowed ourselves to be carried away by the novelty of the thing?"

Mr. Howard was not subtle. He didn't even take up the remark; he was busy arranging in his mind how to get the best advertisement out of the situation. They entered their cab.

"We mustn't let 'em know," he said, "exactly where she came from, but we must work the story for all it's worth. We shall have to stand by her in the theatre, or the others'll claw her to death. You know what I mean, try and spoil her nerve."

Everard had got what he wanted, and, as is

the case with most idealists, was now beginning to feel a little nervous. He was not like the other man, and he had a very real conscience on this matter. You cannot put the oak back into the acorn, and he knew perfectly well that whatever happened, Jenny could never be the same again. She would have been taken out of the sphere in which she had lived, and to be satisfied with it any more would be an impossibility.

"I suppose that woman will know how to dress her?" said Mr. Howard. "She seems quite like a lady."

"She is one," said Everard quietly; "there's no mistake about that. She will dress her all right, it's the one thing I'm quite sure of. The only probability is that she will perhaps bring her to us looking a little too quiet."

When they returned to the theatre the rehearsal had been dismissed, and Everard strolled back to his rooms. He would have liked to return to Little Dean's Court to see how matters were progressing and to offer his assistance, but he felt that Mrs. Goodchild would probably only find him in the way. So he possessed his soul in patience till the next morning.

He arrived at the theatre punctually, although experience had taught him that there was little use in being in time.

A broiling day in August is perhaps the only kind of day on which the stage of a theatre is really pleasant. The comparative chill of it is quite refreshing. The stage was crowded as Everard passed through the iron door which led from the front of the house. To those in authority to

avoid the stage door is to avoid the possibility of great importunity. There are generally a large number of applicants ready to waylay the author or the manager. Mr. Howard was not at the table by the footlights, and glancing swiftly round amongst those on the crowded stage, Everard was unable to see any sign of Mrs. Goodchild and Jenny. Groups of overdressed young ladies were chattering and laughing. Here and there members of the company were studying their parts, whilst in a corner two leading artists were rehearsing a duet and dance. From somewhere in the front of the theatre came the sound of a piano and men's voices singing a chorus. Everard lit a cigarette and began to talk to the stage manager, asking what had occurred at the rehearsal the day before.

"We've engaged a Morgiana," said Everard.

"Why, isn't Miss Bray to play it?"

"No; she was only reading in case we couldn't get somebody else."

The stage manager looked a little perturbed. He had been somewhat premature in conveying the information to Miss Emmeline Bray that she owed her promotion to him, and she, being a lady with a temper, might perhaps conclude that she owed her deposition to the same source.

"Who is it?"

For the first time Everard realized with a shock that he had not the remotest idea of Jenny's surname.

"I've forgotten her name," he was compelled to answer.

"She's not anybody well known, then?"

"No." He was not clear in his mind as to how far Mr. Howard would wish it to be known that Jenny was entirely without experience.

"Miss Bray won't be very pleased."

"People who come on the stage," said Everard cynically, "are taught the truth about themselves in a way which occurs in no other profession. It is the force of circumstances." A commissionaire approached the table and asked him if he would step up into Mr. Howard's office.

Wondering if something had gone wrong in the matter of Jenny, he ran up two flights of stone stairs and passed into the manager's outer office, where half a dozen clerks were at work. He was at once shown through into the inner office, a large, luxuriously furnished room, with a low oak roof, many unexpected corners and a general air of comfort and homeliness, in which the great office desk in the centre seemed somewhat out of place. Sun-blinds were drawn to keep out the glare.

As Everard entered, Mr. Howard was seated on the edge of his desk smoking a cigarette, his face wreathed in smiles. Mrs. Goodchild, in a plain black jacket and a somewhat thick veil, more obviously well-bred than ever, was seated in front of him, and, standing by her side, evidently very pleased with something Mr. Howard had said to her, and showing her wonderful teeth in a radiant smile, was Jenny. But what a Jenny! It may be quite true that beauty unadorned is adorned the most—that is to say, to be absolutely unadorned and in the nude is certainly a test of real beauty—but the simple garments which Mrs.

Goodchild had selected had transformed Jenny amazingly. A small, pale blue tennis hat was on her raven curls, and the simplest little dress in the world looked, in the way it had been put on, as if Jenny had been accustomed to wear the creations of a French dressmaker all her life. Everard had been quite right; there was that curious distinction, that genius for all things in personal appearance which marks the real beauty. It was amazing that this child, who had never had a really new dress in her life, should produce such an effect; and, what was more curious, that she should be so sure of the effect as to be apparently unconscious of it.

Everard and Howard looked at each other and laughed, and Jenny continued smiling, for she was perfectly certain of one thing, they were not laughing at her. The more she was looked at, the better she bore the inspection.

"You're a great success, Jenny." Everard turned to Mrs. Goodchild and said, as he shook hands with her, "She was lucky to have someone who could so surely choose for her."

Jenny passed the little bag which she held in her right hand to her left, and shook hands with Everard. "I am glad I look all right."

"I thought, Everard," said Howard, "that you would put her through her lines, explain to her what the part is, how the cues are marked, et cetera. I'll leave you to it and go on to the stage. Have you brought your skipping-rope, my dear?"

Jenny's face fell. She did not like to be discovered in any lack of forethought.

"That's all right," he said reassuringly. "We'll send out and buy one. I don't suppose we shall want it to-day." He left the room, still smiling at Jenny, and Everard turned to Mrs. Goodchild. "I expect you are wondering a little what's to become of you during the rehearsals? I hope you will look upon me as a person to whom you can come in any difficulty." He had no intention of letting Mrs. Goodchild think that she was to be ignored now that Jenny was more or less launched.

"I wanted to tell Mr. Howard about her father. He makes no objection at all, and is quite agreeable that she should live somewhere else with me for the present. You see," she said confidentially, for Jenny had drifted over to the other side of the room where some illustrated designs of costumes were lying, "he's shrewd in his rather muddled way, and he knows that her nature is of gold, and that she will never forget him. Indeed, I think he is looking forward to a halcyon time. It is selfish, perhaps," she added, "but I am thinking of myself. My position is an invidious one, and may become untenable at any time."

"I have thought all that out," said Everard, "and I am going to make a proposition to you, but not just at this moment, if you don't mind." He turned and looked at Jenny, who was still examining the illustrations. "I am the most responsible for this experiment," he said in a low voice, "and I want everything to be done that can be done. I am going to contribute my mite towards Jenny's career, so will you come and have tea with me this afternoon at my rooms in Jermyn Street,

and we will get to know each other thoroughly ? ” He walked over to where Jenny was standing.

“ These are pretty,” she said, showing him four sketches of Morgiana in four different costumes.

“ Those are what you will wear.”

“ Are they ? ” An expression of keen pleasure crossed her face.

“ Of course I daresay they will be a bit altered to suit you.” He then explained the part to the girl.

“ I told her the whole story of Ali Baba last night. I told her three times, so she quite understands,” said Mrs. Goodchild.

“ That’s splendid,” replied Everard. “ Now, do you understand what a burlesque is ? ”

“ I found that a little difficult to explain,” interposed Mrs. Goodchild, “ but I told her it was making a thing funny by putting it in an unexpected way.”

“ That’s it,” laughed Everard. “ Well, Jenny, you see we tell the story of “ Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves,” and we mix it up with all sorts of ideas about the present day—for instance, in the first act you will be dressed just like a little servant-girl of to-day, in a print dress and cap ; but there, again, it won’t be like that of a real servant-girl, because it will be made in the most beautiful way and of beautiful stuff. In the other acts you wear these dresses.” He then took the MS. of the piece and began to read some of the part. He explained her entrances to her, and took her once or twice through the scenes where she was concerned. “ Now we will go down on the stage. Whatever you do, speak

up," were his last words as they left the room. "I think you had better come too, Mrs. Goodchild. I'll find you a corner."

They went down the stairs, through the iron doors on to the stage, which was now more crowded than ever. A piano was going in a corner, and three people in the centre of the stage were singing a trio. Everard took Mrs. Goodchild to a chair in a far corner down by the proscenium, where she could see everything and was quite out of the way. He noticed that, almost as if by habit, she pulled her veil closely over her face. He had hardly placed her before there was a pause on the stage, and somebody said "Where's Miss Bray?" But Miss Bray, furious, had retired from the theatre, at any rate for that day. The stage-manager, who had arranged for Sunday on the river as the reward for securing the part for Miss Bray, regarded Jenny with a malevolent eye.

"More chickens," he reflected; "ain't women good enough for 'em?"

"We've got a new Morgiana," said Mr. Howard. "Here she is. Take your place there, my dear; never mind your not knowing the dance."

There was a perceptible stir amongst the groups round the stage. Evidently Howard had made a point of finding out Jenny's surname, for he introduced her—"Mr. Gibbons, our stage-manager, Miss Jenny Oldcastle.—Miss Parry, Mr. Frank Dickson, Mr. Fred Belmont, Miss Jenny Oldcastle." The four looked at her in some surprise. She was so absolutely unlike anything they had ever seen before. Miss Parry scanned her searchingly, eager to detect a possible rival and ready to take

measures accordingly. She knew that to be a good artist was not sufficient to retain one's position. Extraordinarily vivacious and a really clever woman, she had more than once been obliged to direct all her intelligence and strength towards the discomfiture of rivals, in which, so far, she had been successful. Her hasty inspection of Jenny apparently convinced her that there was nothing to be feared. Jenny had been primed to say, should anybody ask her if she had been on the stage before, that she hadn't done much, and to leave it at that. If she were unable to defend herself from the inquisitiveness of her colleagues, she must put up with the consequences. The stage-manager had been let into the secret by Mr. Howard, and had been told that she must be made a success of.

"You're in this quartette, my dear. Just listen to it with the others." The quartette was gone through again; Jenny thought the music very delightful and longed to join in. Her confidence was such as could never by any chance be possessed by anyone with experience of the theatre. She was absolutely ignorant of the thousand - and - one disagreeables which were possible. She expected everybody to be as pleased with her as she was with herself. The moment she was brought into prominence, the rest of the company crowded down to the side to get a good look at her. Some of them passed through the iron door and stood at the side of the stalls, although in such a position as to conceal this infraction of etiquette from the stage-manager. The first thing they audibly remarked on was her

genuine childlikeness. Then, because there was no getting away from so palpable a fact, there was a very general admission of her beauty, and perhaps, although it was difficult to put it into words, of her curious apartness as regards style.

"She doesn't look as if she could do anything."

"Perhaps she can't; it isn't expected of some people."

The quartette was taken through again, and to the surprise of the stage-manager, Everard and Mr. Howard, Jenny joined in, with a little smile of pleasure at getting it right. There was nothing remarkable in the singing voice—most certainly nothing that suggested that she could ever be a singer. But she came in at the right moment so firmly, her pipe, withal that here and there it was a shade out of tune, was so bright and cheerful, that it was absolutely right. More voice, more musicianship, would somehow have destroyed the effect.

"Oh, I am Morgiana,
The giddy little Turk.
I scrub the floor,
And mind the door,
And do the daily work."

She actually got a good many steps of the dance right, and smiled in such a happy, confiding way at Miss Parry, that the burlesque diva, in order to show her exactly what to do, lifted her skirts and exaggerated the steps, Jenny imitating her with a surprising lack of confusion.

When the quartette made their exit, Frank Dickson, the king of comedians, lifted her in his arms as she stumbled, and they all arrived at the

side, Jenny in the centre, and one of themselves in a way that established her position as nothing else could have done.

Mr. Howard put his thumbs in his armholes and leaned back with a pleased smile. It would not take him very long to forget Everard's share in the discovery of Jenny. Everard turned to him with an inquiring glance, and the stage-manager, feeling that a discussion was about to take place, turned round and stood facing them.

"She's no great dancer, she's no great singer, and she is never going to be any great actress, but for all that she's just 'it.' All the girls who sing will wonder how she gets there without singing; and all the girls who dance will wonder how she gets there without dancing; and all the girls who can act will wonder how she gets there without acting; but she'll get there all right."

"It's charm and personality," said Everard, "but I don't suppose I could have seen all that at a glance."

"Ah," said Howard, leaping in and seizing the opportunity to plant himself as the chief actor in the discovery, "I saw it all at once."

"Liar!" murmured the stage-manager to himself with some humour. He knew his master.

The only danger was of spoiling Jenny. Before lunch she was absolutely at home with them all. Mrs. Goodchild, watching her, wondered if she were already forgotten, but she was reassured when Jenny came to her at lunch-time. Miss Parry, who had not noticed Mrs. Goodchild, had invited Jenny to go with herself and Frank Dickson, but Jenny declined with a tact which

might have belonged to a woman of forty. Everard would have taken them out to lunch, but he thought it was better for them to find their own feet.

In the afternoon Jenny was taught her song. She was only to have one. At present it was all play to her, and, as Howard put it, there was no reason why this first production should not remain so.

It was rumoured that Mr. Howard had found her singing in a very tenth-rate music-hall—almost a public-house. It was lucky for Jenny that she came into the rehearsal somewhat late—barely ten days before the production of the piece, and that what with first band rehearsals, dress-rehearsals, and the trying on of costumes, the time was so agreeably broken up that she was never once bored. There was one more ordeal to be gone through from Howard's point of view before he was sure that he had got what he expected. She had yet to have the footlights turned on her.

"She may look everything we want," he said, "till she's made up." Therefore he awaited her first entrance at the dress-rehearsal with considerable trepidation, but if Jenny had looked lovely before, there was a glamour about her in the artificial light of the theatre which was extraordinary, the more so as she never seemed to lose her essential childishness.

The day of the first rehearsal, when she and Mrs. Goodchild had gone to tea with Everard, they had been made perfectly happy by him as to the future. An idea had struck him by which Mrs. Goodchild could be made to a certain extent independent of

the situation which Jenny had created. He asked her if she would like to do some copying work for him. The notion was evidently grateful to her.

"And there are other sources where I could perhaps find you some more." He added, in an undertone so that Jenny could not hear, "I suppose the money Mr. Howard gave you melted away yesterday?"

"Most of it," said Mrs. Goodchild, "but I think we shall be all right."

"After the piece opens you will be quite happy, but in the meanwhile you must have everything you want." He handed her an envelope.

Mrs. Goodchild hesitated.

"You need have no feeling in the matter. You must remember that it was I who first found Jenny, and my reputation for judgment is at stake." He would have liked this calm, restrained woman to confide in him, but she was the last person on earth into whose affairs it was possible to pry without encouragement, and as to who she was and where she came from, Mrs. Goodchild was absolutely silent. That she had fought a long fight he was more and more sure every time he saw her, and the more he looked at her, the more he saw that she had been, if not beautiful, exceedingly handsome. As to her age, it was almost impossible to guess. Her hair was grey, in parts almost white, and the lines upon her face, many and deep as they were, were not altogether those of old age—at least this was the impression gained by Everard.

"I suppose," said Mrs. Goodchild, "that copying manuscript is very difficult?"

"You won't find it so," said Everard, with a smile.

The third day Mrs. Goodchild did not go to rehearsal, but sat in the new lodgings in Pimlico, which were heaven to a woman who had been for so long shut out from the comforts to which she had obviously been accustomed. She had a great deal to do for Jenny, for it is wonderful how many things there are to be considered in the most elementary wardrobe according to the creed of a gentlewoman.

Despite the fact that Mrs. Goodchild had done a very great deal for her, the girl still had many lessons to learn. It was surprising, not only how quickly she learned, but how instinctively she realized what had to be learned. There was always a peculiar self-possession and lack of hurry in her manner of approaching a social difficulty. With her large brown eyes grown preternaturally grave, she would observe carefully and look all round the subject, and then cross-examine Mrs. Goodchild on any possible complication which might arise in regard to it. She would not have been what she was if her sense of selection had not led her to choose the best. Once, when they were seated at tea on her return from rehearsal, she began to laugh with an intense sense of inward amusement.

"Why, what's the matter, Jenny?"

"I'm laughing, Mummy dear, at what I used to think was a swell, and what were the best people."

"Do you think the people at the theatre are the best people?"

Jenny shook her head. "Oh, no. At least, that Mr. Ponsonby, who plays a small part, anyone

can see that he's tip-top, and, of course, Mr. Everard's a gentleman; but the others—well, there's nothing common about them, but——"

The subject was a delicate one, and it is perhaps just as well not to record the conclusions Jenny arrived at.

CHAPTER II

THE day of the first performance arrived. Jenny had the distinguishing quality of successful artists; she was ready in every detail. This was due as much to her own work and foresight as to the help she had received. Nothing can be further from the truth than to suppose that successful actors and actresses are slipshod in their methods. It is the second-rate who wait for what they are pleased to call inspiration, and who come hopelessly to grief at first performances because they don't know exactly where they are going, and what they are going to do.

Jenny had been thoroughly well advertised. Already there was a mass of photographs in costume ready to flood the market with, although perhaps even Mr. Howard's idea of the success she would make was not as optimistic as the event justified.

The house was filled with the audience that delights in this class of piece. The Press, that gloomy phalanx which ought never to be allowed at a first night, monopolized the greater part of the stalls. The gallery and pit were crammed

with the adorers of the principal artists. The boxes were occupied by those who, when the management was shaky, were likely to come forward and help to put it on its legs again. Chief amongst these, and occupying the stage-box, was the Duke of Glamoy, looking as magnificent as ever.

How this man could display a zest for so frivolous a form of entertainment after the surfeit he had had of life was almost incredible. He was over seventy, but looked alert and as handsome as he had done for the last thirty years. He was a great noble, typical of the Victorian Era.

He had been a duke almost from his birth, and one of the richest dukes in the kingdom. As Louis XV. accepted his kingship, so the Duke of Glamoy had always accepted his pre-eminent social position. He could have conceived of no other setting for himself. Brave, chivalrous, and with a magnificent physique, he had possessed a virtue which left him at seventy-two with the capacities of a young man. This saving virtue lay in the fact that he was not greedy of the pleasures of the table. He had nothing whatever of the glutton—he was in all things an epicure. At his zenith, before the æsthetic movement, he had been a worshipper of the beauty of life without canting about it. He had been loved by some of the most beautiful women of his day, both in and out of society. His Duchess, whom he had married for purely family reasons, he had admired enormously, but he had never professed to be in love with her, and she had never expected it. She had died a great many years before, leaving one daughter,

now married, a dragon of the Evangelical virtues, who knew all about her father's past, and whilst paying him on the one side all the deference and duty due to a parent of great position, regarded his laxity in certain matters with horror. With such imagination as she possessed she constantly dwelt on the time when he should be too old to dance the dance of death any longer, and when in the space between this time and his dissolution opportunity would be given her to snatch his soul from the burning. If she could have seen it there would, to her, have been something terrible in this scene at the theatre; a crowded and brilliant house regarding with interest the presence of this man of seventy-two, with his enormous reputation and appetite for pleasure. But from the Oddities Theatre to Lady Sarah Brent was a far cry.

The conductor had, amidst applause, taken his seat, stroked his fine black beard, and lifted his baton. The orchestra broke into a tune which would be on all the barrel-organs in a few weeks. Then the curtain lifted, and the piece began. As one by one the favourite stars made their appearance, there were loud bursts of applause. Then, when Hassan asked "Where is Morgiana? I want my boots," Jenny appeared. Mrs. Goodchild's heart was in her mouth, and her spirits sank, for of course there was very little applause, only a few of the people connected with the theatre indulging in a mild demonstration. But she aroused curiosity at once, and she had not been many minutes on the stage before her extraordinary prettiness was realized. She took the most childlike pleasure in the entertainment,

a pleasure which was infectious. There was something big about her, child as she was, which set her quite by the side of the leading people. Towards the end of the first act she had a scene with the comedian in Hassan's kitchen, and so helpful had the comedian found her at rehearsal, that it had developed far beyond its original limits. The extraordinary infectiousness of her laugh, however, had not dawned upon those who had rehearsed her. The Duke of Glamours could not help thinking of two lines from a translation from the French by an English author :

" Her laugh would wake me just as now it thrills me,
That little giddy laugh with which she kills me."

When the curtain fell on the first act, Jenny was a favourite. A little while after the curtain was up on the second act she sang her song and did her skipping-rope dance. All those girls who had been waiting years for their opportunity, and who were jealous of her, were quite justified in their objections. There was nothing in it—or rather, there ought to have been nothing in it ; but if there were nothing in it, why, when Jenny paused at the wings before making her exit and stood with her skipping-rope swinging in her hand, and smiling with an absolute certainty that the audience was going to like her, did the house come down with a thunder of applause ? She certainly had had the good fortune to have a haunting, delicious little dance tune written for her, but this could not be the whole explanation. However, there was the fact. Mr. Howard made a note at once—she must have an opening song in the first

act, and she must sing a duet with one of the comedians. These with the trio and quartette in which she took part would make the audience think she was doing quite a lot. Towards the end of the piece, when, having danced a few more steps before the leader of the Forty Thieves, she suddenly threw the skipping-rope round his neck and strangled him, the audience was more than ever delighted with her, not to speak of the way she made them laugh when, with childlike glee, she poured boiling oil on the forty thieves themselves. At the conclusion of the evening she was called for as loudly as the most accomplished artist on the stage. Miss Parry, who had made a great success herself, and who realized that Morgiana could in no way compete with her, appeared to take a tenth call, leading Jenny, as who should say, "No one is so pleased with the triumph of this sweet child as I myself."

Not even her success was able to make Jenny feel that anything unusual had happened. She did not know why, but she felt it was bound to happen. Mr. Howard stood over her, beaming with delight, and moaned: "You're a good little girl—a good little girl!"—theatrical success was about the only goodness he understood—"and I'll give you a nice piece of jewellery to-morrow."

Everard bent and kissed her on the cheek, saying, "Thank you," and sent them home in a hansom, Jenny clutching two huge bouquets of flowers which Everard and Howard had sent to her dressing-room.

It was an absurd, monstrous event, an unearned reward, unaccountable. Here was no training,

no experience, only the mere capacity to arrive. What shall the Socialist do with the unearned increment of genius, of physical beauty, of achievement? Ten per cent. cannot be taken off kisses earned by a beautiful profile or magnetic charm; yet caresses are more envied than money.

They went back to the Pimlico lodgings, and somehow, looking back on the evening, Jenny became more excited than she had been during the performance. She wanted to know exactly what people had said about her in front, how they had liked the piece—in fact, every detail. Looking at her, Mrs. Goodchild was astonished to see how far her outlook had travelled during the past three weeks. It was almost incredible. She seemed to talk, act, and think quite differently from the little girl who had trundled about the court in a woman's skirt.

“Fancy, Mummy! To think of it! Who could have thought of it! There is no reason why we shouldn't be happy all our lives now, is there?”

Mrs. Goodchild said nothing. It is almost impossible to convey to youth the futility of its dreams; and if it were possible, it would hardly be wise or fair to do so. Having left the excited child to toss upon her pillow for a full hour before she went to sleep, Emma Goodchild went back to the sitting-room, and sat looking at the summer moon which rose over the river. Her mind went back to a scene brilliant with a real and solid brilliance beyond anything Jenny had seen that evening. Rows of spacious reception-rooms lined with historic pictures, and hung with magnificent

chandeliers ; servants in rich liveries moving about among beautiful women blazing in jewels, and men wearing orders and decorations. Amid all this she saw a woman so unlike herself as she was now that she hardly recognized her, a woman consumed with rage and jealousy, yet still with a right to her place amongst these exalted and splendid surroundings. Then she saw her a few hours afterwards, an outcast—all thrown away by her own act. The years that followed of misery and humiliation flowed in upon her like a black ocean of horror. She rose and covered her face with her hands, standing thus a long time, tense and immobile, before she shut the window on the summer night, and with tired footsteps and a face grey with suffering, ascended the narrow stairs to her bedroom above.

CHAPTER III

IF he happened to be in town the Duke of Glamoy always sat in the royal box on the first nights of productions at the Oddities, and a luxuriously furnished sitting-room behind it was set aside for him. After the performance of *The Forty Thieves* he sat for some time talking to one or two friends who had been with him. Mr. Howard finally came to him to hear his opinion. He had a great regard for the verdict of this man who had seen everything in the shape of burlesque for over fifty years.

"It's very good indeed, Howard, very good. I wonder how much longer theatres will be able to stand the increased cost of these productions?"

"People want it, and we've got to give it to them."

"Kate Parry is as young as ever. She really is quite marvellous. Five years ago she showed distinct signs of ageing. They do when they're about forty, and then they get young again."

"How old is she?" asked Lord Moorshott, a youngster of about twenty-three, a great-nephew of the Duke's.

"Old enough for charity to draw a veil," said the Duke, raising his hand in an admonitory manner. Moorshott, who regarded him with veneration, dropped the subject. It was the Duke's peculiarity that behind all his capacity for enjoying the lighter side of life, he possessed that something which gives a man weight and influence. His tact could be depended on. It was difficult to conceive anyone regarding his views or wishes lightly.

"That's a wonderful find of yours, Howard," continued his Grace, fitting another cigarette into a plain amber holder, "quite a wonderful little girl."

"They are going to make a fuss of her," moaned Mr. Howard. "I knew they would."

"I'm a little surprised that the house generally should have liked her so much. Her beauty is of a very untheatrical type." No one would have imagined, from the way the Duke spoke, that Jenny had stirred him as he had not been stirred for many years. He was a little ashamed of it, for he was too clear-headed to imagine for one moment that a child of that age could regard him in any other light than that of quite an old man, and he had still romance enough left in his composition to dislike being reminded of this point of view.

Mr. Howard saw that the Duke would like to meet Jenny, and made a note of it.

The men talked for some time longer, and when the Duke rose to go the attendants in the house were covering the gallery and dress-circle front with sheets. The Duke had put a good many questions

with the purpose of finding out exactly who Jenny was and where she came from. Mr. Howard had answered at length, without saying anything much to the point.

The Duke turned to his great-nephew :

"What did you think of the Morgiana, Moorshott ? "

Moorshott had admired her, but was somewhat too young to appreciate the exquisite sincerity of Jenny's style. At his age, tinsel, by its very pretence, has something more attractive than genuine gold. He still admired oleographs, and thought women with expression in their faces jaded. Jenny, on the other hand, had too little artifice. "She's all right." The tone was dubious.

"You didn't think her very wonderful ? "

"No, I don't know that I did."

"At your age one doesn't go to the theatre to see something quite fresh. I suppose I was the same when I was twenty-two, but it is so many years ago that I really can't remember." The grand old pagan leaned back in the carriage and closed his eyes. He had a habit of taking a little rest whenever possible. He declared the secret of vitality to be in the trick of relaxation.

Glamoys House, was in St. James' Square, an imposing edifice with a Jacobean front, which, however, gave no notion of the spaciousness of the building which lay behind its blackened façade. Glamoys and his nephew ascended the steps and passed into the large, bare stone hall, which had something of a chilling and depressing effect. It retained this atmosphere even when the great gilt sconces which surrounded its massive walls were

alight. Passing through the hall, the Duke led the way down a broad passage, which seemed to grow more intimate and comfortable, till they entered a large, wainscoted room at the farther end, through the open windows of which the summer night seemed to come to them with the perfume of flowers.

"Help yourself," said the Duke, as he sank into a deep chair and lit a cigarette.

Moorshott took a cigar from a box on the side-table. "Can I give you anything, sir?" he said, hovering over a table on which were glasses, syphons, and decanters.

"A little seltzer-water and a sandwich."

Moorshott handed him the seltzer-water and the sandwich, helped himself, and took a seat opposite.

"I am not keeping you up, am I?"

"Good heavens, no! I don't know, but men don't seem to have the stamina they had. They seem to want such a lot of sleep. Perhaps it is because I am growing tired myself, and too old to do what I used to." He said this as only a man with no sense of age could have done. "It's strange," he continued, "the number of people I've seen come and go at that theatre. I wonder what becomes of them all."

"Do most of them end badly?" asked Moorshott.

"End badly—why should they? The great percentage of them end damned well. I suppose the middle classes have to have some excuse for such a reprehensible state of things, but certainly most of the girls at the Oddities are very much

better off at the end of their careers than if they had stayed at home and married in their own class of life. There's a great deal of nonsense talked about them, too. I doubt if they're much faster than the female population in a country village, and they soon learn to take care of themselves. My reading never convinced me that our conventional notions of morality are particularly necessary to a nation's greatness. By the way," he said, waking up to the possibility, "don't let me keep you here if you've anything better to do."

The young man laughed. "It's only you, Uncle, who would have thought of anything like that. I haven't anything to do."

"Why, what's the dear girl doing? For at your age, there always is a dear girl of some kind. Only take care that she isn't too dear."

Moorshott laughed. "There isn't anybody particular at the moment."

Glamoys turned restlessly in his chair, and his thoughts wandered almost before his nephew had finished answering. He was unable to forget the small figure standing in the centre of the stage at the Oddities, and giving that delicious little laugh which had enraptured the house. "Do you believe in women?" he asked Moorshott, after a pause, feeling that it was necessary to make conversation.

"Oh, there are good and bad," answered Moorshott.

"I daresay you're right," answered the Duke dryly.

Moorshott was not a brilliant conversationalist,

and although Glamoy's was fond of the boy and kept an eye on him, he was not sorry when he rose and took his departure for his chambers in the Albany.

After Moorshott had gone the Duke sat for a long time thinking, and always Jenny dominated. Once he laughed to himself—laughed out loud—for he saw the absurdity of it. An old man of his age sitting and dreaming of a child of sixteen. What a dreadful old satyr the world would think him. He wondered if many other men of his age would be capable of such an emotion, and if it were a usual thing of which they were afraid or ashamed to speak; possibly. He supposed that his life had been such as to leave him more susceptible than most men; or should it have been otherwise? One could never be dogmatic about these things. He had intended leaving town the next day; indeed, his presence in London in September was unusual. He had been brought to town by the death of a near relative, whose kinship demanded the courtesy of his presence at the funeral. The Duke was a great stickler for etiquette in these matters. It was his perfect social tact which had made society bear with his moral delinquencies. He never grew careless about such things as concerned the dignity and honour of his order, and had never failed to take part in any of those formal functions to which his birth and standing entitled him. He had always kept on excellent terms with the Court. He believed that any dereliction in such matters was a gross betrayal of trust.

He was curiously wakeful. Again and again

he found himself thinking of the child with her skipping-rope.

Perhaps the knowledge that he could still feel in this way was not altogether disagreeable. His sensations were like those of a traveller who had suddenly passed from a harsh, rude climate into a summer sea. The great adventure of life had always seemed to him to be love. He was instinctively in conflict with the warped creed of his age on the subject, which held that drunkenness, vulgarity, and brutality were all more excusable than an uncommon capacity for loving.

He had been tacitly granted the license which is given to men whom the world admits to have a big consciousness. His great reputation as a landlord and as a fine sportsman struck a balance in his favour with the British public when they were reminded of his emotional career.

Besides, he had never been heartless. No woman whom he had loved ever appealed to him in vain, and none of them were ever heard to speak otherwise than well of him ; he was always benevolently interested in them and theirs. Once and once only had there been a groan from the crowd. A woman he loved, but with whom his relations were quite innocent, came to him one night for refuge from her husband's cruelty, and he kept her with him. Her husband, a Catholic, refused to divorce her, and she died in the Duke's house two years after of a broken heart.

All his life he had been accustomed to get what he wanted, and yet he felt a diffidence and shyness about the pursuit of this new toy which he could not quite understand. Perhaps it was that his

feelings were more involved than he knew. Such ladies from the lighter side of the drama as he had had to do with of late years had not in the nature of things touched him nearly:—it had been merely a certain patronage on his part, with a few presents. Although there had been a great many women who would have been quite willing to enter into his life, notwithstanding his age, which, after all, discounted things, the Duke was far too naturally dignified to make himself ridiculous.

He did not go north the next day, and though he was not at the second night of the piece at the Oddities, he was there the third night and the fourth night.

As for his introduction to Jenny, it took place as it was bound to do, considering that he only had to ask for it; and the attraction of this child for him grew stronger every time he visited the theatre.

Jenny had heard his name mentioned more than once. Miss Parry expressed the opinion that he was "an old dear."

"Although he's never looked my way. But he's a great deal more fascinating than most of the young 'uns."

"But he's quite old, isn't he?" asked Jenny in some surprise.

"He's old enough to be a great-grandfather, and he rides to hounds like a boy."

Jenny was rather vague as to what riding to hounds might be, and promptly asked. This was a characteristic of hers. She never attempted to cover up her ignorance. A grave, reflective look would come over her face as she bent all her

powers towards gaining as much knowledge as possible concerning the subject. Her memory was extraordinarily retentive.

Mrs. Goodchild did not fetch her from the theatre. She had carefully considered the matter, and had come to the conclusion that in Jenny's case it would have amounted to affectation. A girl who had learned to protect herself from the boys of a London slum was either capable of taking care of herself or had no intention of doing so.

One evening after the performance, Jenny, coming out of her dressing-room, which opened on to the stage, passed Mr. Howard and two men who were standing by the now extinguished footlights. The thing was admirably done. They were waiting for her, but there was no appearance of it. Jenny was conscious of a tall figure of great dignity bending over her with an august courtesy; a presence which, as it were, enveloped her in an atmosphere of well-bred charm which was new to her.

With absolute ease the Duke began to make conversation with her, and no one could have guessed that he was stirred.

Miss Parry was leaving her dressing-room at the moment. Mr. Howard crossed the stage and stopped her for a few words about the business of the theatre, giving the Duke time to make friends with Jenny. He then brought Miss Parry to where Jenny and the Duke stood. The Duke was too accomplished a tactician not to turn to Miss Parry at once with compliments as to her evening's performance.

"We're getting it right, Duke; another week, and the piece will go like anything."

"I am sending you some flowers to-morrow evening."—He had only just thought of it.

"Now that is nice of you," chirped Miss Parry, knowing full well that the prospective bouquet was cover for the same attention to Jenny.

"What do you think of our Morgiana?" she asked, and then continued before the Duke could answer: "I think she's wonderful. Just as though she had been at it all her life, isn't it?"

The Duke privately thought it was precisely what Jenny's performance was not like, but he agreed and went on ahead with her to the side door, which the stars were privileged to use, bowing her into her brougham with courtly grace.

"How do you go, my dear?" asked Mr. Howard in his anguished tones. "In a hansom?"

A crawling hansom drew up, and Jenny drove away. Her instinct was not deceived, for all that the Duke had only addressed half a dozen sentences to her. They were great friends already, and she knew it. The smile seen in the gaslight as her hansom drew away from the pavement assured her of it.

"Like most really great stage beauties, she is more beautiful without the footlights," said the Duke to Howard as he stepped into his carriage, offering to drop the theatrical manager if they were going the same way.

Miss Parry had driven away to her house in St. John's Wood. She and her husband, a comedian of French extraction, had a model kitchen leading out of the dining-room, a miracle of white tiling

and shining pots and pans, quite apart from the kitchen used by their servants. It was their especial toy, where they prepared wonderful little suppers for themselves and their guests, and here the Duke himself had eaten kidneys done after a recipe of Monsieur Gavet's—Miss Parry was Madame Gavet—at three o'clock in the morning.

CHAPTER IV

"I 'VE met a duke," announced Jenny, entering the sitting-room where Emma Goodchild sat waiting for her, a light supper ready on the table.

"A duke—what duke?" asked Emma, her mind at once picturing some young rake who had engineered an introduction.

"The Duke of Glamoyes."

"But he's quite an old man."

"Quite. They say he's seventy."

"He's more than that," answered Emma decisively.

"Why, do you know him?" asked Jenny in surprise.

"Of course not, but everybody knows of him."

"He is very handsome," said Jenny, "and he seems to me to be wonderful. He's not like other old men. He seems quite strong, and," she added, with amazing ingenuousness, "he smells lovely."

Emma laughed aloud, but she understood what Jenny meant.

"He ought to be worn out, if anyone is," she said.

“ Why ? ”

The question was difficult, and she answered somewhat lamely.

“ He has had a busy life.”

“ Do dukes have busy lives ? ”

“ My dear, men of great wealth are as busy as stockbrokers.”

“ I always thought people made money so as not to be busy.”

“ They may make it with that idea. They soon find out their mistake. I have always understood that the Duke is a thoroughly all-round man, and does his duty, even if——”

Jenny was too occupied with her own thoughts to notice the abrupt way in which she broke off. The Duke had left a towering impression.

“ Fancy, Mummy,” said Jenny, eating her chicken and salad with as little affectation and as much delicacy as if she had known nothing but gentlefolk all her life. “ Fancy my being friends with a duke. It is funny, isn’t it ? ”

“ Yes, it is unexpected.”

Jenny laughed ; the wonderful little laugh which was her greatest asset.

“ I used to feel honoured if young Mr. Higgins, the rent-collector’s son, spoke to me.” Then she laughed again. “ Am I getting what you call a snob, Mummy ? ”

“ I don’t think so.”

“ Is the Duke married ? ”

“ His wife is dead. She has been dead for forty years.”

“ There was a dukess——” began Jenny.

“ Duchess,” corrected Mrs. Goodchild.

Jenny looked at her doubtfully, wondering if Mrs. Goodchild were laughing at her. "Dukess" to the untutored sounded more natural than "duchess." Seeing that Emma was serious, she corrected herself.

"There was a duchess who came to our night-school. She was like Mother Gamble at the winkle-stall, only fatter and cleaner. She didn't wear an apron, of course, but her face was jolly and kind."

Emma Goodchild laughed.

"Breeding isn't just a question of good looks, Jenny."

"The Duke's good-looking."

"He always was."

"Have you ever seen him?" asked Jenny sharply.

"Oh, years ago. He was a great figure about town."

Jenny was silent and thoughtful. She had once begun to question Mrs. Goodchild in an unthinking, childish way about her past. She had not repeated the experiment. Still, she often wondered about her. She could remember a very different Emma Goodchild from the one she knew now. She recollected a woman who used to reel along Dean's Court with an inflamed face and in slatternly attire, apparently without a vestige of self-respect. She remembered the change without being aware of her own share in it. Indeed, it had amounted to no more than developing an affection for the woman who, when sober, satisfied an instinctive taste for a greater refinement than was to be found around her.

One winter evening Jenny had come across her leaning up against the corner of Dean's Court, with the boys of the neighbourhood jeering at her. The lamplight fell on a face which should have appealed to pity, so pathetic were the attempts to preserve some semblance of dignity. It of course had its comic side, and this served the turn of the young roughs.

Jenny, who knew most of the boys by sight, elbowed her way through them and, calling on her champion, Ginger, to take the other side, helped the drunkard back to her rooms, where she sank helplessly on to the bed in a deep sleep.

"My, she don't 'arf keep her place nice," said Ginger, looking round by the dim light of the candle.

Jenny had seen it look nicer, but it was true that the simple cleanliness of the place was a surprise.

"I'll get 'er clothes off and put her to bed," said Jenny, moving Ginger towards the door.

"You?"

"Why not? Father's on night duty. P'raps I'll stay with her."

And Emma, waking up in the morning as the winter day dawned, wondered how she came to be in bed. She had no recollection of undressing. Her mouth was terribly parched. The public-house round the corner would probably be open by now for the men driving the market-carts. She made a move to see if there were any more coppers left in her pocket, and to her astonishment felt a small hand held out unconsciously to detain her. She turned round to find Jenny's head pillowed at her

side. The child, disturbed by the slight movement, half awoke, and nestled closer to her.

Till full day Emma lay, now and then turning her eyes on the sleeping child at her side. Jenny, she knew, had no mother. With absolute confidence the girl had lain down by her side, sure that her place would not be questioned. Once Emma pressed the little hand that rested on her arm. As she lay gazing at the whitewashed ceiling, a wave of returning moral strength seemed to roll over her. She was saved. Jenny had adopted her, and compelled her protection.

Gradually Jenny had come to look upon this room where Emma lived as her home. Emma taught her to sew and to improve her reading and writing. It was wonderful how sympathetic a companion she found her. She began to wonder if the drunken little ostler at the omnibus stables could really be her father. She showed a ready appreciation of good books, and of ideas superior to any she could possibly have met with in the slum life she had been accustomed to. By degrees their life together became a singularly happy one in its way. Emma took Jenny's religious teaching in hand and Father Hawthorne, who had made more than one attempt to get on terms with Emma, seeing them at church, descended on the couple and insisted on being treated as a friend.

One evening, soon after, Emma had a long talk with the priest, a talk which comforted her greatly.

"There are more loves than one," he had said gently as he let her out, "and you, at least, have

someone who loves you and trusts you. Depend upon it, Jenny is a gift to you from God."

That was four years before, and now they were sitting in the Pimlico lodging. How strange it all seemed.

"I like the Duke, Mummy."

"Do you?"

"Very much." The tone was decided.

It was the tone which Emma Goodchild knew there was no gainsaying.

A few days afterwards Jenny announced that the Duke wanted to take her for a drive.

"And he wants to come and see us," she added.

Emma looked up startled, objection in every feature.

Jenny's face fell, for though she had taken a liking to the Duke and had determined to be friends with him, it would be awkward if Emma offered an absolute obstacle as far as she was concerned.

Emma knew it was not the least use pretending an authority which she did not possess. As Jenny had no sense of intended wrong in the matter, she would not be influenced by it.

"Do you think it wise?"

"I can't see why not," said Jenny gravely, taking up her position without the least show of petulance, but perfectly prepared to do battle reasonably. It was this reasonableness which made it difficult to deal with her. It revealed so many weak spots in the axioms of conventional authority.

They argued the matter, and inwardly Emma had to admit that she was getting the worst of it.

"A friend like that, so much above you. He will unsettle you."

"As far as that goes, Mummy, the Oddities was far above me, wasn't it?"

"Why does a man like that want to be friends with you?"

"He likes me."

Emma felt a delicacy in pointing out that, considering the disparity in position between them, such a friendship was suspicious.

"Don't you trust me, Mummy?" asked Jenny, coming and standing in front of Emma.

"Yes, oh yes. I shouldn't be here if I didn't."

"Then why mustn't we be friends?"

"People will talk."

"Do you mean the people in the theatre? They talk as it is—of everybody."

"I don't only mean the people in the theatre. Remember you are quite a celebrity. He is a man of great position. You live in the public eye."

"I can't see that it matters what people say."

The eternal cry of youth, which it is almost impossible to answer. It is so difficult to inculcate a surrender to public prejudice as a moral lesson, and public opinion is always public prejudice when it conflicts with our wishes.

Emma felt herself beaten before the argument was well begun. She was acute enough to perceive that though it was evident that Jenny liked the Duke, there was in her mind the opportunity involved of coming into contact with the select; and in the case of things animate or inanimate, Jenny was always swift to seize such opportunities.

It was possible by putting the objections at their crudest that Emma might have carried her point, but she felt the victory would have done as much harm as good.

“ And you will let him come, Mummy ? ”

Still Mrs. Goodchild hesitated. What could she say more ? She could give no reasons for his not coming, beyond those which would not appeal to Jenny, which, indeed, her nature was incapable of understanding. It was quite impossible to suggest any danger with regard to a man of the Duke's age. It would have been a discussion altogether too unpleasant, and yet she knew him by reputation ; indeed, years before, she had met him more than once. But that was another story. It was not likely that he would recognize in Emma the woman he had met years before as an equal. On the other hand, to put it on the ground that the Duke's wealth and position made an acquaintanceship undesirable would not appeal to Jenny. It was precisely because these limitations did not affect her that she was where she was. She was one of those creatures who fly to the topmost branch with absolute ease. Her mind was entirely un-snobbish. Besides, Jenny's career was the stage, and she had a right to such friends as she was able to make. Mrs. Goodchild realized that she would either have to give up her charge or put up with such a state of affairs. Well, she would, if need be, give up her charge at any moment, if a suitable person should be found. Had she been quite honest with herself, she would have admitted that this sacrifice, although she would have made it had it been for Jenny's good, was

the last thing that she desired. It would have been a culminating anguish in her life.

The Duke came to fetch Jenny for her drive, but Emma was unable to see him. She was really unwell with violent neuralgia, which attacked her at times and rendered her quite helpless.

"You mustn't think it is because she doesn't want to see you—she really is ill," Jenny explained.

The groom moved not a muscle as Jenny came down the steps. There might have been nothing singular in the Duke's companion, and the fact that she had been discussed already in half the servants'-halls in Mayfair would not have been perceptible to the closest observer. The man holding the horses never moved his eyes to the right or the left, and the lad who stood by the steps was equally impassive. Yet they had both made a special journey to the Oddities to see this new flame of the Duke's. In their eyes it constituted a greater claim to respect than if he had been the president of missionary or foreign Bible societies. Amongst themselves Glamoy was known as a regular old sport. He could do many things which would have rendered lesser men ridiculous. To one who was such an authority in the political, sporting and racing worlds, and whose opinion besides carried weight in more than one department of art—not that his servants thought much of this—such little incidents seemed the finishing touches. Once only, when the second man sprang up behind, did his eyes meet those of his colleague, and they exchanged the shadow of a smile—a smile with pride in it, as if they shared in the glory of a *liaison* the

meaning and purpose of which they had entirely misunderstood.

The phaeton turned out of the little Pimlico street. Every landlady was at her window, and every landlady's maid-of-all-work keeping her company. The free action of the splendidly-matched horses gave Jenny a delightful feeling of exhilaration. They swept across Ebury Bridge and along Sloane Street, taking the road which ran by Knightsbridge Barracks. As they passed the Park gates, an old gentleman, seated well back in a victoria, suddenly leaned forward and gave the Duke a beaming salute.

"That, Jenny," said the Duke, "is the Prime Minister."

Jenny looked vague. She was not at all clear as to what a prime minister was, but, instead of attempting, as an inferior intellect might have done, to conceal her ignorance, she said, "What is a prime minister? Is it anything to do with chapel?"

The Duke proceeded to enlighten her. He gave her quite a little lecture on the Constitution, and was astonished to find that she took an intelligent interest and was not bored. The lecture lasted till they reached Hammersmith Broadway. Jenny had never been as far as this in her life; it was all strange land to her. She had never been in the country; she had never seen the sea. All that she knew of the country was Hyde Park, St. James' and the Green Parks, and that most delightful of all parks for slum children, Battersea Park. All she knew of waters was the river Thames from Charing Cross to

Chelsea. On one occasion she had been going to Epping, but the outing had not taken place.

As the full extent of her limitations dawned upon the Duke and he glanced down at the well-bred-looking little beauty beside him, he was amazed. It was perfectly true that every now and then she said something which would have been a horrible solecism had it proceeded from a really common mind. If by any chance she misplaced an aitch, she restored it to its proper place without worry or flurry, treating the better-class English which she had learned much as if it were a foreign language which she was anxious to speak perfectly, but felt no disgrace at not being completely mistress of.

"Would you like to see the sea, Jenny?"

Jenny nodded. "Very much indeed."

"Shall we go and see it on Sunday? We could go down to Brighton by an early train. No, we won't go to Brighton, we'll go to Hastings."

"Shall we take Mummy?"

"Of course," said the Duke, "but I don't believe she'll come."

"Perhaps she won't," said Jenny, a little disappointed. "She doesn't like going out."

The Duke was disappointed too. He knew pretty well what people would say at seeing Jenny much with him, and he had welcomed the idea of her having a chaperon who was quite presentable, and who was a guarantee for the respectability of a somewhat peculiar connection.

They bowled across Barnes Common and up Roehampton Lane and entered Richmond Park. Jenny gave a cry of delight. She began to appre-

ciate what the country might be like. It was an exquisite morning, and though there was still a freshness in the air, the atmosphere had a certain mistiness which told of heat to come. The park, with its green expanses, wooded places, and fern-covered dells, was a source of absolute joy to Jenny. She had no idea of pretending she had seen anything of the kind before, and it did not strike her to conceal her surprise and rapture from the two automatons seated at the back. She gave a sigh of disappointment as they emerged from the Kingston gate on a row of suburban dwelling-houses. Then again she became interested. Why couldn't she and Mummy live in a house like these? There was one with a most beautiful little garden in front, all red with geraniums, and a baby in its perambulator at the gate, being made ready to go into the park, while the young wife in a white apron gave her final instructions to the little maid-of-all-work, who was no doubt nurse when the early-morning housework had been done.

"Wouldn't it be lovely to come and live here?"

The Duke expressed himself to the effect that it would be very pleasant indeed. "But wouldn't you sooner live by the river?"

"Oh no."

Then he remembered that the river she knew was the London river. An idea struck him. Instead of turning to the left towards Esher, he drove straight through Kingston, across the bridge, and turning to the left again, drove along a number of lanes. On crossing Kingston Bridge, Jenny had gazed in amazement. It was late

September, and the river was still gay with pleasure-boats, whilst, although the vogue of houseboats was not what it became later, they could be seen, here and there in shady places, gaily painted and bright with their display of flowers.

This was a very different river from anything which Jenny had conceived. Young men with stalwart arms were propelling light, gracefully-built skiffs through the water, smiling and chattering to the girl or male friend lolling in the stern.

It would indeed be pleasant to be rowed like that. She wondered if the Duke could row. He seemed to do all the things that young men did, and without effort.

"Can you row?" she asked.

"I used to. I rowed stroke in the Oxford Eight."

This sounded cryptic, and had to be explained to Jenny.

After they had driven along the lanes for some time they came to a large gate in a high wall. At a word from the Duke one of the men sprang down and rang. After awhile the great gates with a lamp swung above them opened, and the lodge-keeper appeared.

Protruding over the wall by the gates was a board, on which was written the announcement that this noble residence was for sale. The gate-keeper, surprised to see the Duke, threw both of the doors open wide. As the carriage passed in the Duke paused and said to the lodge-keeper: "Take that board down at once, Brown," adding,

"Wife and children all right?" The man beamed.

"Very well indeed, thank you, your Grace. Mrs. Brown is up at the house."

They bowled along a drive up to the front door of a large white house.

"We're going in here, Jenny, for a little."

The other man sprang to the horses' heads after having rung the bell, and, helping Jenny down, the Duke and she waited inside the pseudo-Greek portico. The door was opened by Mrs. Brown.

They passed into a spacious hall with a great deal of furniture in it, and staircases branching off on each side.

"Open all the windows, will you, Mrs. Brown?"

Then the Duke stood and looked round, and he was silent for what Jenny thought quite a long time. Perhaps he had forgotten her presence for the moment; perhaps he saw, coming down the staircase, the ghost of a beautiful woman, a woman he had once loved, whose memory he loved still. Had Jenny been other than she was, he would not have brought her to this place, and could she have known it, it was the greatest compliment it was in his power to pay her. His Duchess had never entered it. For a great many years the house had been untenanted, yet furnished from cellar to garret as it had been in former days. He remembered the wrong he had done this woman, the midnight flight, the wild night ride to Portsmouth, the gaining of a yacht but two hours in advance of a furious husband, of the wonderful days in the South, where

he and she wandered through Syria—a long way in those days—their own, and a perfect happiness. He remembered the return to this house, and how she had drooped. Shame was a thing she found difficult to live with when the first ecstasy was over, yet she never loved him less. Later, he remembered a young man arriving post-haste from town and entering the hall with a face white with foreboding. He saw himself take the stairs four at a time, frantic with remorse and penitence for even a momentary neglect, and enter a room above with fevered haste, only to find it the dwelling of peace and death. These things the Duke remembered, as he and Jenny stood in the great cool, dim hall. After a little he led her down a corridor, and, opening a beautiful old mahogany door, magnificently carved, they entered a curiously-shaped circular room, where the furniture was under white sheets, now being rapidly removed by the housekeeper. There was a large bow window, which had been thrown wide open, through which the morning sun blazed with an almost overpowering effect, and there, in front of them, was the most beautiful garden Jenny had ever seen, and barely a hundred yards off, the river, like a ribbon of silver, with a lawn of velvet leading to a landing-stage.

She did not know that what they were really looking out on was a large backwater which made for privacy, and that the land immediately opposite was an island which belonged to the house. There was a bridge connecting the island with the garden.

When the Duke had started out with Jenny that morning, a visit to this house had been the thing farthest from his mind; yet somehow he had a pleasure in standing there with her which he would have considered inconceivable. From over the large mantelpiece a full-length portrait of the woman he had loved smiled down on Jenny as if she were glad to see her there, as if she were welcoming her, and it seemed to the Duke as if, through the house associated for so many years with painful memories, he heard a laugh—a light, clear laugh, driving away sad thoughts.

Then they went into the garden, and Jenny ran up and down by the river as if she would never tire of its delight. After a while he took her over the house; such great, lovely bedrooms there were, and everything else on a scale which Jenny had never experienced. And yet, delightful as it all was, she was not in the least bit silenced. It seemed quite right that things should be like this, that the world should be a beautiful place, and that ugly things should be put out of sight.

After a while they went back to the house, where the Duke was met by a perspiring little man in a black coat, who listened to certain instructions given in rather a low tone, and who seemed never tired of saying "Quite so, your Grace," and whenever he said "Quite so, your Grace," he made a bow, and when the Duke shook hands with him he was evidently so impressed that he managed to be shaken hands with, and not, as it were, to shake hands himself, obviously anxious to eliminate from the proceedings any touch of familiarity on his own part.

"If you get a telegram from me saying go ahead," finished the Duke, "you can proceed. But, at any rate, don't put up the board again. I may want the place next summer."

"Quite so, your Grace."

They drove away, and the Duke was silent for a few minutes. "How would you like, Jenny, to spend a little holiday in that house?"

"Oh, I should love it, and I am sure Mummy would love it too."

"Let's try and persuade her, shall we?"

They drove on through Bushey Park and out on to the broad road by Hampton Court Green. They then had lunch—lobster—and because in those days people drank wine as a matter of course, Jenny had a glass of champagne, which made her feel a little uncomfortable. Then the Duke took her over the Palace. There were not many people about, and the State Rooms were seen at their best. The Duke explained things to her, told her who had built it, who had lived in it, who had altered it. Then they had tea, from the partaking of which the Duke excused himself, but Jenny had a lovely meal—shrimps and tea and watercress. And then they drove back.

What a day it had been! In some way it was even a more important day than the one on which Everard saw her dancing in Dean's Court. She had seen what life might be—what the life of some people was, and it struck her as being delightful, but not strange. Perhaps strange in a way, but at any rate she had never once felt out of place. She accepted the companionship of

the Duke without question. They seemed to have become good friends so naturally that it never struck her that there was anything incongruous. Why should it? She knew nothing of the Duke's social atmosphere, or, as it were, his poise before the world. She was too inexperienced to have even put it to herself that this man, old enough to be her grandfather, could be regarded as a possible moral danger, or that, advanced in years as he was, his fascination might be effective. In her adolescent mind, as is the case of most young people, love-making was a question of courtship, because, although she knew a very great deal more than young girls of her own age brought up in respectable society, she still did not associate even things that she knew with her own life. It was precisely because she could not be approached as an ordinary girl of her class that she interested the Duke so much. She accepted his attentions with an absolute confidence that infected him with her own mood. And so they drove back to London in the growing dusk of the early autumn evening, a quaint couple for the psychologist.

The Duke turned to the little figure seated at his side. He felt no incongruity at a man of his age being seen driving with this little favourite of the stalls and gods at the Oddities. Perhaps it was because all his life he had done this kind of thing, and it had in a way become second nature. "Do you like being with me?" he asked.

Jenny looked up happily. "Of course."

"Oh no, there isn't any 'of course' about it. I am a very old man—a Methuselah——"

"What's Methuselah?" asked Jenny.

"Methuselah was the oldest man that ever lived. That's something to have been, isn't it?"

"Shall I call you Methuselah?"

"No, I'd sooner you didn't do that," said the Duke, laughing. "But what I mean is that you must say at once if you find me dull——"

"At once!" assented Jenny mischievously.

"I shan't be a bit offended."

"I don't know how anybody could find you dull."

The Duke thought to himself that either this was the most beautiful compliment an old man had ever had paid him, or that Jenny was the most consummate little trickstress. A man with a past like his has to pay for his discoveries in female psychology. When the real compliment comes along, he finds it difficult to receive it wholeheartedly and ingenuously.

"That's very charming of you, Jenny. Very charming indeed."

Instinct prompted Jenny to say something which came from her heart. She touched the Duke's arm lightly. His eyes turned and met hers. She looked into them with a radiant smile, and said:

"I mean it." Then she added: "We've had a lovely day."

And the Duke believed her. It was as if the accumulated cynicism of years had been brushed away by the light touch of an angel and it was given to him again to have faith.

Jenny did not know that there were few men of his age who could have gone through such a

day and such a drive. This *tour de force* she took as natural.

He left her at the door of her rooms. She was to drive with him again on Sunday. They had settled that.

CHAPTER V

MRS. GOODCHILD was alone. Jenny had gone to rehearsal. The morning was warm, and she was at the window with her work-table, an old-fashioned thing, a sort of rosewood well, set on three legs, which she had taken possession of.

As she worked she was thinking deeply. It was true that from earning a few shillings a week she was now in a position of comparative comfort, but there was a factor in the arrangement which disquieted her the more she thought of it. She was practically at the mercy of a child's temperament. She loved Jenny and believed in her, but who could foretell how a nature would develop under such circumstances? If it suddenly went off at a tangent, as female characters have a way of doing, what was she to do?

She could never desert her, that she knew. How deep a hold the child had on her nature no one knew but herself. If, however, things turned out badly, her own position might become an equivocal one. She sighed deeply as she bent over her sewing.

This friendship with the Duke of Glamoy's was not a thing which could be treated lightly. She had consented to the drive, but the situation would have to be grasped. The measure of Jenny's danger was the measure of her fascination.

A hansom rattled up to the door, and as she glanced out of the window, she saw the top of a well-kept tall hat disappear up the steps.

A few seconds after, the landlady, palpably in a flutter, announced the Duke of Glamoy's, getting the words out with a sort of gasp, as if their unaccustomed splendour choked her.

Mrs. Goodchild rose in surprise and alarm. She forgot Jenny for the moment, feeling only that for the first time for years she was in contact with the world she had known, that she was being intruded upon.

The Duke realized that his appearance without having sent up his card was an offence, and hastened to apologize. He ended by asking if he might sit down, as he wanted to speak to her on an important matter which concerned them both.

"You have come to talk to me about Jenny?"

The Duke was somewhat surprised at the ease of her manner. He was accustomed, as are those of his rank, for people of a different class to be a little overwhelmed, but Emma Goodchild received him with that consciousness of equality which is the most difficult thing in the world to pretend to.

He was somewhat at a loss how to begin. Jenny had described Emma as "dear Mum, who takes care of me." Once she had said with reference

to some question which had arisen : " Mum wouldn't let me do that—she is a lady," which had conveyed to the Duke the idea of a woman with pretensions to gentility.

So in the presence of this quite natural and well-bred manner, he had to reconsider his line of action.

He wanted Jenny to spend the rest of September and the month of October in his house by the river. As usual he meant to have his own way, but the mere personality of Emma Goodchild, before she had even opened her lips, constituted a barrier. He felt that this woman knew him, knew of him, and was on the defensive.

He meant no harm, however, and he was inspired by his good intentions to put matters simply.

" I am an old man, Mrs. Goodchild."

Emma Goodchild looked at the alert figure before her, and her eyes wandered from the well-groomed head and the trimmed moustache to the carnation in his button-hole. She drew her own conclusions but made no reply.

The Duke smiled in the way peculiar to him when he was suddenly confronted with the ridiculous side of himself, but he went on bravely.

" Miss Oldcastle has roused a very great interest in me. Mr. Howard has told me all about her, where she was found, who she is, in fact, everything."

" Did he tell you where he found me, Duke ? "

There was no trace of anger in the voice, no resentment in fact, but the Duke flushed.

" I assure you——"

Mrs. Goodchild broke in.

"I am not offended, nor hurt," she said with a faint smile. "I am not egotistical in these days. I only want to know."

"He did tell me." It was absurd to assure this woman that it was of no moment. She would have treated such a remark with indifference.

The Duke saw that it was best to come straight to the point. Quite seriously, for he really believed it, he told Mrs. Goodchild that his fondness for Jenny was purely paternal, that he wanted to do all he could for her, and that he would be glad if Mrs. Goodchild and Jenny would accept the loan of his house on the river for the remainder of the summer. "I am glad I've got it all out in one speech. It forms at any rate a basis for argument."

And argue it they did. Emma Goodchild, on her side, did so without kid gloves. She made many objections. The Duke met her at every turn.

"Whatever happens," he said, bending forward and speaking with great seriousness, "a beautiful child like that will have temptations rained upon her. There will be no price too high."

"Marriage," suggested Emma.

The Duke winced and she was quick to notice it. The idea of Jenny belonging to another hurt him. Why should it if his feelings were purely platonic?

"If a good match offered itself no one would oppose it, would they?"

"You might be considered an obstacle."

"If a man is really in love he tries his luck."

"That is true."

"I want to join forces with you in looking after her. That is really my position."

"Do you think the world will look at it in that way?"

Perhaps the Duke had had some idea before he entered the room of dispensing with Emma Goodchild. He would not have been surprised to meet the usual harpy ready to take the girl's beauty and attraction to the best market. Five minutes' conversation revealed to him the secret of Jenny's manner, the perceptible growth in her towards the best. He realized that Mrs. Goodchild was indispensable. If he could succeed such an ally would preserve the girl as his companion, and, ridiculous as he felt it to be, he desired her to be with him; and in order to salve his conscience he told himself that his one object in life should be to place her properly—to arrange a good marriage for her. He would leave her a fortune, a quarter of a million, if things turned out as he expected. He would give people clearly to understand that she was in the position of his ward. It may have suggested itself to him that if he were so well intentioned towards her it would be kinder to keep entirely in the background. There are sacrifices, however, which are not made, and this was one of them.

"The public will always say the worst of a girl who comes before it in that way."

"Is that your experience?"

He felt the implication that his public was not necessarily the whole public.

"You don't trust me?" he asked at length.

"I don't say so."

"I give you my word of honour——" he began.

Mrs. Goodchild looked up quickly. The speech was accompanied with a certain magnificence of manner.

"If you give your word of honour, Duke, I trust you at once."

He felt she had been too clever for him. He would have liked to take back that speech. It had closed the door, barred and bolted it, on much. He concealed a certain anger at having been led into making it.

"Then I may tell them to put Glamoy's Lodge in order?"

"I must put the matter to Jenny first. I will write you a line to-night."

He looked at her curiously. Emma wondered if he remembered her face and grew alarmed. Then she dismissed the idea. He had sat next to her at dinner and had been in her box at the opera once, twenty years before.

"I hope we shall be friends, Mrs. Goodchild." He smiled. "Our position will be a little curious, but I think we have tact enough to manage."

Then he talked of Jenny. He was never tired of doing so. He talked of her as a boy might have done of his first love. At least he talked of her as much. Emma sat and listened. Every now and then there came through the window the impatient stamp of the waiting horse or the spasmodic jingle of its bells. She was wondering what made this man so essentially young, what gave him the capacity for taking an attitude which in any other man would have been absurd.

"You see," he said, "it was a dangerous career on which to launch any girl as amazing as Jenny."

"We had reckoned on that, but everyone has a right to their chance. What was open to her? The career of a maid-of-all-work, or a navvy as a husband."

The Duke gave a little shudder. The picture was so impossible as a setting for Jenny.

"And then," went on Mrs. Goodchild, "we had to deal with genius."

"You don't think her a great actress, or that she will ever be one, do you?" asked the Duke quickly.

"She has precisely those qualities which will prevent it," said Mrs. Goodchild. "She has too much instinct for the facts of life. No, in speaking of genius I meant her capacity for personal beauty, for it is a capacity, even if the raw material be a gift, and, above all, her genius for social progress."

"I understand. You are quite right. No environment seems to disturb her. That charity benefit she played for at the Melboroughs, she was quite in her element, which dear Miss Parry was not."

Emma Goodchild smiled. "It is deliberate, and self-conscious. She knows what she is doing."

"So I have discovered, and it is the more incredible."

They talked on, never tired of their subject. It was besides for Emma a great refreshment to be in the company of the Duke.

As he talked to her he wondered more and more who she could be. A dozen almost imperceptible touches revealed that she was quite at home in the nuances of his world. He realized the reason of much which had puzzled him in regard to Jenny.

Left alone, Emma wondered if she had made a mistake. She did not see how she could have acted differently. She could not think or act as if Jenny were an ordinary girl. As for her own part in the business, what did it matter—what could her reputation matter? The most evil things would be said. She would appear as the girl's purveyor in certain eyes. She was convinced, however, that Jenny's innocence would be her best weapon, and that the Duke would be a powerful barrier to the attentions of younger men.

As she was reflecting deeply the maid entered to say that there was a young man called Bellew below.

Of all people in the world, Ginger rejoiced in the name of Bellew. Where his parents had obtained it, and whether they had a right to it, it was impossible to say, but he was exceedingly particular about the spelling and pronunciation of it. Indeed, like many people who possess something which they regard as exceptional, he was inclined to measure other people's value in relation to it. He was inclined to look down upon Jones, Smith and Robinson, however well-to-do they might be. Ginger was the only person in Dean's Court who had been entrusted with Jenny and Emma's address. The departure of Jenny had been the grief of his life so far. He had worshipped her as a divinity, yet with the idea of one day possessing her, for human beings have a way of believing in miracles. He knew her value, for in Dean's Court the loss of virginity was more usual than its retention, and no breath of scandal had ever touched Jenny.

He had seen, however, that from the moment of Mr. Howard's appearance on the scene his chance was gone. He had too high an opinion of Jenny's capabilities to believe otherwise.

He entered hastily, his face white and excited.

"Jenny 'ere?"

"No, has anything happened?"

"'Er father——" He paused, feeling that the tone in which he had said "her father" was a sufficient indication of tragedy.

"Is he dead, Ginger?"

"Killed, 'bus run clean over 'is 'ead. 'E was in the narrer way, comin' into the yard—a 'bus swung round the corner, 'e was too drunk to be slippy, and it was over in wunst. Never even 'ollered; awful, ain't it?"

"Yes, I'll tell Jenny, and later we'll come round. Where is he?"

"In the morchually, by the church."

"Very well. Won't you sit down, Ginger? You look white."

"Carn't stop, Mrs. Goodchild. I come in my dinner 'our. It give me a bit of a turn." He paused, and then added, "I seed Jenny the other night; at the theaytre."

"Oh, yes; what did you think of it?"

"Grand, ain't she? Gettin' on, ain't she? Suppose she won't know me soon."

He looked at Emma dubiously, a little pathetically.

"Don't be afraid, Ginger, Jenny will never outgrow her old friends."

"I believe yer right. Still, it 'urt a bit, seein' her like that, but I likes to see her gettin' on—I

likes to see it," he repeated, as if trying to conquer unworthy feelings and convince himself he was speaking the truth.

"I'm sure you do."

Ginger went away, promising to look out for them near the "morchually."

"She carn't see 'im."

"Of course not."

The business of telling Jenny of her father's death was easier than it would have been in most cases. Her nature was too frank to pretend to an affection which she did not feel, but she was shocked, and displayed a certain tenderness for the memory of the drunken old reprobate, who had often left her to suffer cold and hunger sooner than let his craving for drink go unsatisfied.

Emma had her own views as to the genuineness of the old drunkard's fatherhood. Various statements had reached her which left little doubt in her mind as to the facts of the case; still, it was one of those comic episodes which show how purely artificial are the conventions of life.

The man was buried decently. There were quite a number of wreaths, including one from the omnibus company. It was extra large, perhaps on account of there being no widow and orphans to claim damages. Jenny's well-made black dress was the admiration of Dean's Court, but her tearlessness was considered hardly seemly. Thus the last link with Dean's Court was broken.

There was henceforth no one to say her yea or nay, only Emma's advice, which she could accept or reject as she thought fit.

Jenny did not play for a week, and Miss Bray,

who had consented to return to the theatre as her understudy, took her place.

The stage-manager and certain disappointed people in the theatre declared her to be an immense improvement. "But then," they added, "you're an artist." So poor Miss Bray bounded and smirked and squawked, and the stage-manager, who told her it was heaven to see somebody who could do something with the part, was taken into favour again, and her own particular friend, the Honourable Arthur Jervois, stood about in the bar, and asked his friends if they'd seen Nell in her great success. Then Jenny returned and Miss Bray's dream of being asked to take the part permanently was shattered.

Jenny and Mrs. Goodchild had spent the week in making themselves comfortable at Glamoy's Lodge. Everard was one of the first to hear of what was proposed, and he did not approve.

"It is no use protesting, Mr. Everard. I know all that can be said against it, but Jenny has made up her mind."

"Surely she is not so obstinate."

"It is not obstinacy. She has argued it all out. You quite understand that I should not stay with her one moment if I were not sure that there is nothing wrong."

"But what inducement can the Duke have?"

"He cannot resist Jenny—or rather, for the suggestion came entirely from him, he finds her necessary to him."

"And she?"

"Curiously enough, she is perfectly happy with him. It is the strangest friendship in the world."

"Does she realize what people will say?"

"She says she does not mind what people will say."

"Yes, but she is such a child."

"I told you from the first that you would not find her easy to understand. I always have a great difficulty in opposing her. I have a feeling that she has vision, that she sees further than most people, and yet she is quite level-headed. Much as she likes me, she would have gone to this house, whatever I said, because she wants to, because she has a feeling that it is her way. Do you follow me?"

As an author, the psychology of this appealed to Everard.

"But the Duke of Glamoy's," he objected.

"The Duke has given me his word."

"If he has given you that, everything but the appearance of things is all right."

"We must let that go. Jenny insists."

Everard was puzzled. For a moment he wondered if Emma were capable of consulting her own interests before those of Jenny. He put the idea aside, however, as unworthy. Whoever this woman was, whatever she had been, not once since Everard had known her had she shown aught but the most devoted unselfishness to Jenny's interests.

It was not the best time to take possession of a house on the river, but Glamoy's Lodge was not in the nature of a habitation which was intended solely for the summer. Jenny accepted her new position with the greatest appreciation but with perfect equanimity. Those who did not know

her and the essential loyalty and affection of her nature might have accused her of a certain social priggishness.

Scandal at the theatre was rife. Two parties were at once formed. Those who believed the worst, and those whose instinct inclined them to the truth.

There were those who would have been only too glad to accept the attentions of the Duke on any terms, and these, of course, were loudest in their denunciation of the infamy of the proceeding. A girl of seventeen and a man over seventy !

"Over seventy?" said Miss Bray, rouging her cheeks violently with a hare's foot. "Much nearer eighty! It makes me blush." She added several extra blushes in honour of the occasion with the hare's foot.

"My grandma remembers him in the old days. She went down to the 'Star and Garter' with him when she was in the ballet at the opera. But perhaps there's nothing in it."

"Nothing in it!" screamed Miss Bray, almost ferociously. She turned to the looking-glass again, and, dabbing her face feverishly, said, "You make me laugh."

"My grandma says he had a way of being kind to girls just for kindness."

"Then I should think your grandmother has some jewellery she can't account for."

This subtle attack went over the head of the other girl, a fat, placid creature, born, so to speak, in view of the footlights.

"My grandma——" she resumed.

"Oh, bother your grandma," retorted Miss Bray, wrought up to the highest pitch of fury.

Even placidity was roused.

"You're jealous, my dear," the placid one said smoothly, and with an amount of good humour which made the remark doubly exasperating. It is ever the unanswerable jibe. Indeed, to answer it is to admit the suggestion.

Miss Bray flounced downstairs in order to be in time for the few lines she spoke when the opening chorus was over. She met Jenny in the passage, and her temper having reached the point at which she was not mistress of herself, she flew past her, sweeping her out of her way. The action might have been an accident, but Jenny knew it was not. She looked after the incensed lady with wide-open, brown eyes which grew thoughtful as she returned to her dressing-room. She did not reproach Miss Bray, but she managed to convey to her in an intangible way which awed that good lady that it must not occur again.

The Duke was seen very little at the Oddities. In fact, when Jenny and Mrs. Goodchild were installed at Glamoy's Lodge he left them to themselves for a whole month. The portrait in the dining-room remained undisturbed. Emma knew the story of it, and she realized that its continued presence was a compliment.

The Duke taught Jenny to ride.

"Ever been on a horse, Jenny?"

"Any number of them."

The Duke looked surprised.

"How is that?"

"'Bus horses—I used to ride them in and out

of the yard. They were darlings ; all horses are darlings, aren't they ? ”

The sentiment appealed to the Duke immensely, and he was more than delighted when he found that she had a natural genius for horsemanship.

“ Took to it like a young duck to water,” he told Mrs. Goodchild after Jenny's first lesson. “ She's got a wonderful seat, and nerves of steel.”

His interest in her grew. The occupation of teaching a nature which was capable of such rapid progress was fascinating. Whatever traces of her early upbringing had remained were dissipated as her world became full of the sunshine of things which were congenial to her.

The sense of companionship which grew up between them was extraordinary. He felt, however, that she was busy selecting with unerring instinct what he should teach her. She assimilated from him facts, details of social procedure, and nuances which it was obvious from her after-conversation and conduct she did not forget. She announced her ignorance on subjects about which she wished to be enlightened with a grave dignity which imparted the effect of a young and inexperienced monarch seeking guidance from her prime minister.

She never trifled with the Duke's dignity, however, as a vulgar mind might have done. Emma noted her progress and her bearing with growing admiration and wonder. She had always believed in her and had all faith in her, but her development was beyond expectation. What surprised her also was the unvarying care with which she went through her task at the theatre.

As regards her dressing, she had had, of course, the initial good taste of Emma to help her, but she brought more to it than was given her. The quiet ease of her taste was its most noticeable feature.

She accepted the Duke's kindness as though it were the most natural thing in the world, though without displaying any lack of gratitude.

In the finest natures there is no jargon about dependence, although they value independence above everything in the world. It is only small natures which cannot accept without a sense of inferiority, just as only big natures give without patronage. In the larger mind there is too great a sense of equality. That is why an aristocrat finds it easy to be affable to a crossing-sweeper.

"Treat 'em as equals," said the Duke one day, discussing the desirable thing in dealing with social inferiors. "Treat 'em as equals."

"I've adopted you, Jenny," he said one day. "I've adopted you, and, after all, I've no one else. My daughter Sarah is married to an evangelical confederate."

Jenny looked at him with wide-open eyes.

"Oh, it's not a new kind of Hottentot—nothing so nice. He's an enormously rich landowner, who spends most of his money on the Low Church——" he paused. "I see you don't understand."

"Is he a friend of Father Hawthorne? His church is low."

"Low in that sense has nothing to do with the height of the building. Brent looks upon Father Hawthorne as an agent of the devil."

"Then he doesn't know him."

"I fancy not. Let me give you a brief history of the English Church. It will be amusing. The Church of England is the most astonishing religious structure in the world. It is the supreme compromise between belief and expediency. It is the most subtly-designed machine for keeping the priest in order. He is a state official. He teaches divine knowledge as the member of a department. Bishops are appointed not infrequently by an atheist."

"What's an atheist?"

"A man who believes in God—too much."

Then the Duke descended from the airy heights of persiflage, and explained an institution in which, at heart, he sincerely believed. Jenny's brows contracted as she listened carefully to the detailed explanation given picturesquely. The Duke was inwardly amused. Explaining the Church of England to a little actress on horseback! Incongruities pleased him.

Jenny, however, listened with intense gravity, as if it were the most important thing in life. She was determined that she would understand the current conversation of educated people.

She had one or two falls in using phrases which she did not quite understand, but in her determination to know she would not allow herself to be daunted.

The spectacle of the magnificent old roué riding about the neighbourhood of Kingston with the beautiful star of the Oddities by his side was the joy and scandal of the district.

He was foolish, no doubt, but he had an idea that the real innocence of the affair would gradually

impress. With his knowledge of life the assumption was unpardonable. People believe what they want to believe, and the situation was too interesting not to take root in imaginative minds.

Jenny, of course, had other admirers.

There were many of the younger generation who considered that if the Duke had nothing better to do than to pluck fruit intended for youth, he had better seek the family mausoleum.

"It's not playing the game," said my lord of Sark and Alderney, a fair, anæmic youth of twenty-two. "He ought to give us young 'uns a chance."

"What young 'uns?" asked his dear friend Chummy Lemon lazily.

"Why us, of course."

"I don't suppose it ever struck him you were young," answered the friend of his heart. "Personally I put you at two thousand on the day of your birth, and you've aged a century for every year since. It's your antiquity that's so attractive, but young girls don't collect curios."

"You know what I mean."

"No, I don't."

"Then you must make a study of yourself."

It was the very few for whom Jenny did not possess glamour. Perhaps women admired her even more than men. She was born with the gift which her own sex detect at once as the supreme test of the place a woman will take in the scheme of female beauty and charm. She concealed the art by which her outward individuality was built up. Her nature was free from the ostentatious. Her colleagues at the theatre were always wondering why she did not appear in the jewels which the

Duke must undoubtedly have given her. Her simplicity annoyed them, and seemed to them an affectation. Jenny had grasped the cardinal social principle that education is not a question of what one knows but what one is.

There were even those who declared that she was the Duke's daughter.

The most persistent attempt to capture her was made by a young Jewish millionaire, who, superlatively handsome and accustomed from childhood to buy everything he wanted, imagined that youth and superior wealth might get the better of old age and strawberry leaves.

So they might have done had Jenny's character been what he supposed it to be, and had her ideals been only such as he was capable of understanding. He could not conceive that what money cannot buy is more important than money, a lesson which the children of earth have not yet apparently got a glimmering of, for all their wanderings.

Isaac Salmano, a Portuguese Jew by descent, an aristocrat of the Ghetto, conceived an extraordinary passion for Jenny which found almost immediate expression in a gift of pearls and diamonds so magnificent that Hilda Long, the dancer, who was present in her dressing-room when Jenny opened the case, exclaimed involuntarily :

" Good God, my girl, he's sent you his fortune ! "

Jenny stood looking at them in wonder and amazement. The beauty of the ornament ravished her.

" Put it on," said Miss Long.

" Oh, no ! "

" Aren't you going to keep it ? "

"Of course not."

"Won't the Duke let you?"

Jenny received this tactless remark with that curious insulation of self which was at her command and which was her great strength. She did not reply, but the way she moved about the room said as plainly as words that it was not a question of the Duke and that she was responsible for her own actions.

"Have you met Salmano?"

"He gave me fifty guineas for a programme at that benefit last week."

"What did he say?"

"I don't remember."

This answer was made up of two sides of Jenny's character—her sense of honour, which always made her loyal even to those people she did not like, and her natural diplomacy, which some declared to be not quite a nice trait in one so young. This diplomacy often kept her quiet where mere youth would have been garrulous.

"He could marry you," said Miss Long sagely.

"Why, I don't even know him," laughed Jenny.

"Hilda Graham only met Teddy Silchester on a Sunday afternoon on the river, and the Saturday after they were married by special licence, and she was Lady Silchester."

"I should want to know a man better than that."

"No, you wouldn't, not if you knew you were in love with him."

"But how could I know that in a week?"

"Love at first sight is the only kind of love

which lasts, and in that case there's no question of getting to know, when you know you know."

Jenny thought that if everything people said about Miss Long were true, she should be an authority.

"The messenger's waiting, Miss," said the dresser, a woman who six months before would hardly have asked Jenny into her humble abode to take a cup of tea.

She handed a receipt for Jenny to sign.

"Do the parcel up again, Mrs. Evans."

"Oh, I should wait till to-morrow," protested Miss Long.

"Why, it might give a wrong impression."

"Well, you *have* got a will——"

Here Miss Long dived from the room, in response to a frantic appeal from the call-boy.

Salmano, sitting in the stalls, half hoped that Morgiana would beam upon him almost from her entrance, but she never looked his way, and in the final scene when, discovered to be the Sultan's long-lost daughter, she appeared in royal raiment, the necklace was absent. He swung out of the theatre in a tempest of evil passions, and, being a man of strong will, ground his teeth with the determination to secure Jenny if possible.

"I'll marry her if necessary." He quite believed that this would ensure success. "She looks half a Jewess as it is," he added, throwing a sop to his race-conscience.

With the loss of dignity incidental to infatuation he walked past the stage-door, in the full consciousness that those hanging round it knew him well by sight, and also knew that he had no business in that direction.

The Duke was seated in his brougham by the stage-door, and the soul of Salmano grew even more sick at the sight.

"Horrible! Horrible!" he murmured. "She can't be worth much."

Yet, however little she was worth, he had been willing to open the campaign with a forty-thousand pound necklace.

Before he had gone a dozen yards there was the sound of little feet behind him, and a small hand was laid on his arm.

"Oh, Mr. Salmano, I saw you pass and I felt that I must thank you."

His heart was in his mouth, and his face grew radiant.

"Then you are going to keep it?"

"Oh, but I couldn't. It is beautiful, but I really must not accept it."

The words were a little stilted, a habit of Jenny's when she was excited and the strain on her English grew tense.

"Why not?"

"I can't, but I am very grateful. Good-night."

She was gone and Salmano was in torture.

He could not ignore the wonderful tact with which she had passed by the obvious meaning of such a magnificent gift. It might have been a ten-guinea ring she was refusing. There was something supremely distinguished about the way it had been done. It was like a great lady dismissing an impertinence with grace and charm, out of consideration for the offender, converting the offence into a mere mistake.

Perhaps Salmano felt that a certain patronage

in his attitude had been delicately resented and turned against himself, without exactly knowing how. He tried to think that she had refused the jewel because the Duke had either given or promised her a better.

"An old fool like that would give her anything," he reflected savagely as he turned the key of his gorgeous rooms off St. James's Street.

Then he sat down and wept tears of rage and sorrow and, being alone, strewed ashes on his head and wrung his hands as his ancestors had done in times of woe in far Palestine. There was no need to preserve the fiction implanted by his public school training that he was a cold-blooded English aristocrat. No Arabian donkey-boy robbed of a handful of coppers could have raved more.

He did not give up the game, but he knew that the quarry was not for him. To cover his defeat he found himself automatically siding with the party, a small one—who declared that the Duke's interest in Jenny was paternal—grand-paternal. It saved his vanity.

The Duke was touched by the fact of Jenny returning the jewel so promptly. It was in accordance with the character he had believed her to possess. In explaining his armorial bearings to her she had been much impressed by the motto of his house "*Loyal en tout.*" Incidentally, the mention of this motto had led to French lessons.

At times the Duke was extraordinarily amused at the method with which Jenny set herself to learn the social code, a thing which most people would no doubt be ready to assert cannot be taught.

She reduced it to a positive science. When she came across a new fact in this social science of hers, whether it was a shibboleth or a matter of civilized conduct, she paused and surveyed it; she then informed herself by questions and examination as to its nature, and after full inquiry as to its treatment by the best authorities she tackled it, with outward calm but unsuspected inward turmoil.

The Duke was far from wishing her not to enjoy herself, and Jenny liked entertaining. She gave luncheon-parties at Glamoy's Lodge, parties which were somewhat of a surprise to such *habitués* of the Oddities as were invited.

Teddy Barham, whose idea of Bohemian society was a relaxation of such social tone as he had been accustomed to, declared that he might just as well be in Chesham Place with his mother and sisters, and wondered where in the name of heaven Jenny got her ideas from.

"We all drove down feeling thoroughly jolly and she received us like a princess."

"Wasn't that jolly?"

"I don't want to be a snob," retorted Teddy, "but I've been received by real princesses, and it isn't any particular novelty. I say at once that I expect a burlesque actress to be rowdy. I shan't go again."

But he did. He went to see Jenny whenever he got the chance, and ended by falling in love with her, and having to go round the world to get over it.

"She puts on a lot of side," said Moorshott to Miss Parry.

Miss Parry, whose position made her superior to jealousy, answered crisply: "What nonsense

you men talk. We women are supposed to be spiteful, but I don't think we are half as bad as you are."

Moorshott looked at her in some astonishment.

"What do you mean?"

"Here's a girl who declines to be merely a holiday-maker for you, so that when you've done sufficient mischief you can scuttle back into your own camp, and you positively resent it. One would think you had as much right to her as your grouse and partridges—that she'd been preserved by one of your gamekeepers."

"Then what's she doing at the Oddities?" He flushed crimson as he realized what he had said, but Miss Parry surveyed him with the quiet unction of one into whose hands her prey has been delivered, and she proceeded to make a meal of him. For half an hour she raked his lordship fore and aft. He was not to imagine that artists could be treated as if they were something quite different from humanity. She could not imagine where his class got their idea from that the stage was a sink of iniquity. Having defended the morals of her profession, Miss Parry carried the war into the enemy's country and skirmished with spirit up and down his lines. Compared to women in smart society actresses were—so she declared—models of decorum, and she ran through a string of titled dames to prove her point.

Moorshott, who was privately unable to see that it mattered one way or the other, was glad to get away.

It was perfectly true that women as a rule sympathized with Jenny's attitude more than men.

They came more quickly to see that it had in it no conscious snobbery. Indeed, it was impossible to accuse Jenny of snobbery. On the contrary, she had the true aristocratic indifference to class. Ginger took tea in her dressing-room, to his intense confusion and shyness. A large party of children from Dean's Court came down to Glamoy's Lodge and bore away the trophies and presents from a Christmas-tree which was surely the most wonderful ever seen. Emma suggested that the Christmas-tree might be set up in the church schoolroom.

"That is just where even you don't understand us gutter-children," laughed Jenny. "Gutter-children are quite happy in their gutter, and you are quite right in saying that they would be much jollier and happier in the church schoolroom, but it wouldn't be the same wonderful thing to talk about. Ordinary people are much happier with each other on their holidays, but they would give it all, and be made wretched and uncomfortable and shy, for the opportunity of saying that they had dined with the King."

"You are too clever, Jenny," laughed Emma, "you go too fast."

She puzzled everyone more or less, and yet her character was quite direct. It was they who, looking for side issues, lost sight of the straight line of it—a very usual mistake in a cynical world.

The amount of work which she managed to get through in her process of self-education was extraordinary. She studied French, music and literature with absolute ferocity, not because she was

particularly anxious to be proficient, but because she realized that to know about them was a necessity.

The Duke was amused and pleased. There was something in this attitude which lent to the situation a dignity which at his age, had Jenny been the average child of the light theatre, might have been lacking. He was in a sense responsible for it, for once, in the earliest days of their acquaintance, he had remarked how very far a little education went, but that it was absolutely necessary to have this little.

"Of all the people who learn French only the few can make a practical use of it. As regards music, thank heaven, the days of the incompetent performer are numbered."

"Do you think I shall be an incompetent performer?"

"You will never be a remarkable musician."

"Why not?"

"Because you don't come to life from the point of view of the emotions—from the point of view of heart."

"You mean I am heartless?"

"Not at all. The emotions have quite an important place in your life, but had life been for you a study in emotions there would have been somebody in Dean's Court."

The Duke had appeared one sunny morning at the top of that fashionable residential quarter, and had gazed with distaste at its stunted oblong, its terraces of dilapidated Georgian dwellings, and at the high, greasy stucco wall at the end

It was very interesting to him ; it was marvellous. How had Jenny developed such qualities in such surroundings ?

Yes, Jenny was inexplicable. She was genius. The Duke had suspected from the first that the stage was a means which had come to hand and which would by no means be an end. That she was instinctively moving to a definite goal he was sure.

" Do you think you will marry an actor, Jenny ? " he asked one day slyly.

It was characteristic of her loyalty that she did not at once deride the idea of marrying a member of the profession to which she owed her success, but it was quite obvious from the glance she gave the Duke that she had no intention of doing anything of the kind.

Calculating Jenny sounds, no doubt. It is paradoxical that this quality of calculation is considered a defect in youth, whereas if youth fails it is precisely the lack of this quality which is blamed. It is assumed that its possession argues want of heart.

" Whom would you like to marry, Jenny ? "

" How can I tell ? "

" I suppose you have ideas."

" Who would marry me, Daddy ? I've no family."

" That may be an advantage."

" Yes, but what I mean is that no family would have me."

" Why not ? "

" I'm common."

" I haven't noticed it, but perhaps you're a better judge than I am."

"You know what I mean. I couldn't go to Court."

"Your being common is no bar to that."

With exquisite ingenuousness Jenny had revealed the class into which she expected to marry. The Duke turned away to hide a smile. The flight had been swift beyond description.

"Things are changing rapidly, Jenny. Very soon no doubt, leading actresses will be as important as Duchesses."

"You're laughing at me."

"Not at all. Why shouldn't it be so? After all, a clever woman using her talents is better than a stupid woman misusing her opportunities."

"Yes, but it wouldn't be much good being in society if everybody was in it." And she laughed deliciously.

"That's it, we are all exclusives at heart, aren't we?"

"I don't know what you mean?"

"Particular, very particular. You're so very particular and dainty about life. You want the best."

"That is why I chose you as a friend."

"I call that hitting below the belt, Jenny," answered the Duke, with a twinkle in his eye.

The Duke's conversation invariably fascinated her. If she did not always understand what it was about it sounded beautiful. It moved her to indefinite mentalities, as music moves the artist to vague emotions.

"I thought I chose you, Jenny."

"We chose each other. After we had been introduced I realized that you had meant something to me from the first."

"You are getting very deep, Jenny. In fact occult—subtle."

"What is subtle?"

"A person is subtle who is delicately far-seeing in design. You flatter with premeditation."

Jenny did not pursue. The Duke was going too fast, and she always knew when she had culled as many facts as she could digest.

Now and then when she was angry to the rare extent of expressing her emotion she would suddenly flash out with a harsh intonation or a rough gesture, which more amused the Duke than otherwise, but which left her vexed with herself beyond measure. These displays, however, grew fewer and fewer.

The world busied itself with the extraordinary combination, as it was only natural it should; that is to say, the world which lay outside those circles which were included in the theatrical circumference. Balham as well as Bayswater was interested. It was the irony of the situation that in this quite innocent case the Duke's name became coupled with Jenny's more than it had been with that of any other woman.

They were, perhaps, with the exception of Emma, the only people who were unaware of the extent to which they had interested the public. There was the peculiar magic of genius about the affair, and like most matters of genius, its power to compel attention was inexplicable.

It was wonderful the number of things they found to do that first winter. The Duke was astonished and delighted to find how much took on a new interest when seen in her company. They

went to picture galleries and museums. He took tickets for any music which he thought might interest her, or, coming to see her point of view, which he thought she ought to hear. Jenny, with a seriousness which would have been comic to the understanding onlooker, viewed much and listened to much which was not altogether amusement, which, indeed, she found dull.

The winter passed, and Emma found it difficult to believe that this self-possessed, beautiful girl, who accepted with perfect ease so much that wealth and taste could give, was the frightened maid-of-all-work who had burst into her room in Little Dean's Court with the news that two "splits" had followed her, and she wanted to know what she had done.

The change was incredible, but it was there, palpable and visible.

CHAPTER VI

JENNY experienced that delight which the coming of spring in London gives us when we are young and things are well with us. The tension of winter relaxes. Our being, like the ground, thaws, and we ourselves slowly unfold, as it were, in the growing warmth.

Emma wondered if Jenny ever regretted any of the old life. There may be corners even in the most squalid memories which give rise to sentimental longings, but she never heard her talk of Dean's Court except as a phase which was less real to her than her present one. Perhaps it was. Perhaps the real Jenny only gave a little of herself to that period from an instinct that it was ephemeral. In addition, it was curious how little her stage life counted in regard to realities.

In all this there was, as Emma knew, no lack of heart. She was of an impulsive generosity when moved, and that she was truly pitiful was demonstrated by the fact that she gave to the repulsive and destitute, and not to the superficialities of picturesque poverty.

She had already been handed the part she had

been cast for in the piece which was to follow *The Forty Thieves* at the Oddities. It did not excite her any more than her theatrical career as a whole excited her. Her success had come so easily, and she had become so sure of her personality, that she was quite without nervousness as to whether her first success might not be followed by a failure. She realized that performance had little to do with it ; that there were girls who could act better, sing better, and dance better, but that there was not one who could be sure of the applause which always came when she stepped upon the stage, or who could second the efforts of the comedian with such a delicious laugh.

She herself was infectious of delight, and she knew it.

But success was her handmaid.

Her new song was whistled everywhere ; but, then, all that chorus could do to impress its tune-fulness on the audience was done, and as a crowning touch the comedian came to her help with a concertina and two costermongers' caps, one for her and one for himself.

Perhaps it was Derby Day which first showed Jenny what a celebrity she had become. Miss Parry, who was a respectable married woman with a husband on show, chaperoned her. The other ladies of the party were a singer from grand opera, who had been a great beauty before her figure and voice both developed to abnormal proportions, and the two daughters of a famous dancer, themselves studying their mother's art. Neither against mother or daughters had there ever been a breath of scandal.

The Duke was not so foolish as to suppose that Society would deem his coach-load of Bohemians the more respectable because its members were so in reality, but it was a comfort to him to know it.

Moorshott and three or four other men completed the party.

Moorshott drove most of the way, but near the downs the Duke took his place and tooled his coach on to the course. The excitement of the arrival gave Jenny a foretaste of the day's enjoyment.

It had been grey and cloudy on starting, but as they passed on to the downs the sun came out in full glory. There were audible murmurs of "the Duke of Glamoy's" from the crowd as they came up the hill.

By the English crowd the Duke was chartered to do as pleased. The genuine London crowd is absolutely unsnobbish and likes to see a great noble using his wealth humanly and with enjoyment of the good things which are going. It has a keen eye for the real value of the sentimental philanthropist, and on the whole prefers the man who has the courage of his pleasures.

The spectacle of the grand old roué handling the ribbons with an ease which might almost have been mistaken for carelessness, a carnation in his coat, and his hat with its rakish and slightly old-fashioned brim, was something they could understand. It was certainly something they could sympathize with. The dark-eyed beauty at his side was such a natural adjunct to what they knew of his Grace that the crowd would have felt

cheated had some perfectly-placed great Society lady been there instead.

A murmur of admiration which was almost a cheer arose from the crowd as the coach took its place.

Moorshott managed such wagers as Jenny made. The Duke did not bet. He had no views on the subject, but it didn't interest him.

It was the public's day, for the favourite won, and Jenny found her ten pounds turned into thirty. Moorshott had been much amused at the seriousness which she had brought to bear on the subject of her bets. Most young ladies of her world expected to be paid if they won, and to hear no more of the matter if they lost, but Jenny watched her account as if it had been her profession, and asked so many questions that by the end of the day she knew quite a great deal about the racing world.

It was her first taste of those pleasures the original flavour of which can never be recaptured. Epsom Downs never again look quite the same as they do on the day of our first Derby; the pageant never again blazes to the eye with the same splendour and enthrallment.

Soon after lunch she made a rapid descent from the coach.

"I can see a friend of mine."

She had caught sight of Ginger, who had tramped to Epsom the day before and had slept on the Downs.

She knew that he had seen her, and was purposely sparing her the trouble of recognizing him. He was astonished to find himself suddenly accosted by her.

The incident was nothing, except that it did her good feelings credit. It was an astonishing fact, however, that the whole action was so naturally and easily done that it possessed a dignity which robbed it of any lack of consideration for those on the coach. The Duke was not on the coach at the time, but as he was returning to it he saw Jenny on the outskirts of the crowd, talking to her friend.

He stopped and looked at her inquiringly.

"This is Ginger."

The Duke had, of course, heard all about him. He greeted him affably and exchanged a few words with him before returning with Jenny to the coach. "Had anything on the favourite, Mr. Bellew?" The "Mr." and the remembrance of his name decided Ginger in the Duke's favour.

"Just a bit, my lord."

"Then we're all in luck, aren't we?" laughed Glamoy, as he stood a little aside whilst Jenny said good-bye.

"Nobody can say you forget your old friends, Jenny."

"Why should I? One of these days I am going to make Ginger a present of a greengrocer's business."

"Why a greengrocer's business?"

"Because it's the business he understands."

"Then we'll see about a greengrocer's business for him a little later on."

All day long there were a certain number of people who stood near the coach and frankly stared at its occupants as if they had been a show. As the stars of the Oddities, they were interesting

to the crowd, but it soon became apparent that it was Jenny who was the chief attraction, a fact which made her a little nervous, as Miss Parry, who was perfectly genial providing she knew she was playing the chief part, was apt to become unpleasant if she found someone else was getting ahead of her with the audience. Jenny need not have been afraid. The cheerful egotist at her side was incapable of realizing that she was being outshone; she could only measure in encores.

It was not only the crowd that stared. Fashionable women insisted on being escorted backwards and forwards past the group so that they might get a good view.

"Astonishingly effective, without being in the least bit vulgar," pronounced old Lady Balaclava. Her reputation was slightly worse than that of most of the town demireps, but she had managed to hold her position to a green old age the Lord only knew how.

"No other man of his age could do such a thing without being ridiculous," she concluded, bowing affably to the Duke as she passed.

CHAPTER VII

AS for the Duke, having undertaken Jenny without any very clear idea as to how it was all to end, even perhaps with some suggestion at the back of his mind that it could end as others had done, was compelled to admit to himself that he was caught in his own trap—the trap of the paternal, fraternal or platonic, the trap which women know so well how to set—which, to do them justice, is set in self-defence.

The Duke could not have made love to Jenny—the thing had become impossible. She had thrown herself so entirely on his generosity, she had accepted him with all the confiding innocence of a child who is taken by the hand to a shop to buy sweets.

She was quite sure that her liking for him and her affection for him were great payment. Not that she was sordid enough to put it in this way, but the egotism of a great nature which knew itself gave her this conviction. Emma and the Duke must be made happy; this was the most important thing in life, and any question which bore on this found her alert, resourceful, and full of

patient tact. Had the Duke made love to her, it is conceivable that she might, with a concealed sadness, have conceded much to make him happy, but though she would not have let him see it, it would have spoilt everything. Nothing could ever have restored the thread of the fairy tale. It would have been a fairy tale no longer. There would have been no miracle. The giant would have killed the fairy prince on his way. It would have been a kind, good giant as far as he went, but a giant who looked at everything from his own point of view, and not hers.

Yet the Duke's passion for her was great. It astonished him. Perhaps because he was human it flattered him that he still possessed such strength of feeling.

"Not all ashes," he murmured gently with a smile, as he reflected on it, and once he added: "It is well to be able to drink champagne the last thing at night, but is it wise to do so?"

"The last thing at night." He supposed the end could not be far off, and yet he felt extraordinarily young. Was death a huge mistake into which life had blundered? The idea pleased him. Obviously death was a mistake.

Jenny knew as well as he did the moment when it had become impossible for him to suggest anything between them. That moment, for all his nice sense of honour, was not when he had given his word to Emma. For men of all shades of loyalty have a habit of forgetting when the sun in the heavens strikes too hot. It was a moment which was passed without their knowing, undistinguished by an event, unmarked by compact.

The transition had been too subtle for definition, but the transition had taken place.

Emma felt it almost as soon as they did. A curious, added happiness came to all three with the knowledge. A joyous confidence reigned where there had been a certain sense of strain.

The experiment had been successful from the point of view of their united consciences. It was impossible for her to see into the womb of time. No, not a moment in advance of the present can we foretell. The next instant may shatter the world or hurl it into the bosom of the sun. Character and circumstance frustrate our plans.

She sometimes wondered how it would end. The Duke might, with his health and physique, live till he was ninety.

Would he willingly see another man take Jenny away, even in marriage?

The Duke was too fine a gentleman not to do everything in his power to make the position absolutely comfortable and smooth. Jenny, although she called him Daddy, had too much tact and was too intuitively cognizant of his character, to treat him other than as a comrade. She knew the weak side of him, if weakness it were, namely, the objection to the consideration of old age as a thing to be put out of the way in a fireside arm-chair.

CHAPTER VIII

WITNESS to Jenny's many aptitudes but to her lack of dramatic genius, the Duke debated at times whether there were any point in her remaining at the Oddities, where she every day became more and more identified with a career it was obvious she would never shine in except by force of her delicious personality.

He discussed the matter with Emma Goodchild. They were never tired of talking of Jenny's future. Emma was of opinion it was better to leave her where she was.

"People who rise as she has done should be kept thoroughly occupied. You and I, Duke, count for much in her life, but she is too young not to want more."

"But the people at the theatre don't convince—as far as life is concerned. You know what I mean."

"Perfectly; but what other society is open to her? A husband might force the gates of those places which hold the elect, no one else could. All other testimonials are suspect."

The Duke hurriedly left the subject. He did

not want to be reminded that perhaps he was doing Jenny an injustice by allying himself openly with her.

"She gets on with the people at the theatre."

"That is because she has so much tact."

"Possibly. Still, Miss Parry and she are great friends, and it is another interest."

So Jenny remained where she was, and, curiously enough, took very few holidays. She hardly left London at all. The second year she was at Glamoy's Lodge she found the river quite sufficient.

Moorshott, who had come to the conclusion, after keen observation, that nothing could be more respectable than the household at Glamoy's Lodge, was very fond of Jenny and used to take her on the river a great deal. Once only, on a Sunday evening in July, when the sky was wonderful with stars and the air balmy and warm, did he attempt a little love making. No great lady, accustomed all her life to ignore what it was not convenient to see, could have passed it over with more well-bred ease.

"I wonder where the devil she gets it from? He can't have coached her in that."

The idea of the Duke rehearsing her in the possibilities of such a scene was delicious.

"She plays the game with the old 'un," he reflected, and could not resist giving her her share of credit for it.

So the summer went by, and the winter came, and the second spring, and the third summer since the miracle in Jenny's life, and she was nineteen and a half. At times she would remember

the hot midsummer nights in Dean's Court with the population out upon the doorsteps and herself content to chatter with some group of boys and girls in the shadow of the grimy wall that formed the blind alley. It was surely a dream. It was impossible she could have had such a childhood. Why should she have been singled out for such promotion? It made her feel that behind the ever-changing comedy of life there was an irresistible purpose pulling the strings by which the puppets were worked. Father Hawthorne came down and lunched with them sometimes. He would sit in the garden with Emma and talk till it was time for Jenny to give them tea. Exquisitely gowned, she presided over a tea table the equipage of which would have bought up the whole of Dean's Court. He would murmur, "We have not seen the end of the miracle yet."

CHAPTER IX

IT was August, and Jenny was undoubtedly run down. She had grown languid, and some of the life and radiance had gone from her eyes.

At the first word of the matter from Emma Goodchild the Duke took alarm and called in a celebrated specialist.

To consult so much eminence was, in the case of Jenny's indisposition, like breaking a butterfly on a wheel. Sir Eminent, however, only prescribed eight weeks at the seaside. "A quiet spot with no attractions," he said, shaking a long white forefinger at Jenny playfully.

"There must be no fatiguing amusements of any kind, no frivolity. Do you think you can stand that for eight weeks, dear young lady?"

"I shall like it much better," answered Jenny gravely, and in a voice which made Sir Eminent jump out of his insinuating manner and pull himself together. His attitude had been the one he was accustomed to assume in dealing with young ladies of the class to which he believed Jenny belonged.

He escorted her to the door as if she had been

a duchess, and the little bow and smile Jenny gave him suggested that he was forgiven for making a pardonable mistake

Emma arranged the matter. She took in her own name a parsonage close by the sea-shore on a little-frequented part of the south coast. Jenny's identity was not to be revealed. The Duke promised to take them down and then leave them to themselves.

It was evening when the Duke, Emma and Jenny arrived at the little terminus of Seaborough. They had left a broiling day in town, but as the train sped south the weather changed. When they alighted on the somewhat exposed platform on the rising ground at the back of the town the wind blew strong and fresh. The fly rattled down the High Street, and suddenly, at a bend of the road, the sea was revealed. The tide was rolling in across a great expanse of sand with growing fierceness. The sky-line was grey above the miles of white horses.

The Red House lay beyond the town, and the way to it was along a white road which skirted the shore. The pungent smell of seaweed was in their nostrils, and they passed within a few yards of wild rocks round which the sea was swirling and breaking. The spray flung up by the force of the waves was scattered wide by the rising gale. The seabirds, driven landward by the storm, circled above their heads, uttering their weird and plaintive cries. They looked like grey ghosts in the evening light.

Around the parsonage stretched wild common-land, except where the sea-shore itself ran for a

short way by the garden wall at the back of the house.

The evening was chilly, and Emma and Jenny were glad to see the comfortable dining-room with a fire alight. Jenny had been in grander houses, but this was the kind of house she knew nothing of. On the walls of the dining-room hung several oil paintings of undistinguished merit, pictures of naval and military officers and parsons, hunting squires, and portly merchants. Their own servants had preceded them, after having been given strict instructions that they were to talk of Mrs. Goodchild as the tenant, and not to mention Jenny's name or the Duke's.

The wind grew more violent every moment and raved and howled round the house like a wild beast. Jenny, never having experienced such a thing, indeed never having known what an awesome thing wind could be, was considerably alarmed and asked them if this sort of thing was usual.

They reassured her.

"Do people ever get used to it?"

"The wind is a curious thing. Some people love it, other people's nerves are completely destroyed by it. I don't think the young mind it much. People who have sad associations with the sea must dread it."

"It sounds like great guns, doesn't it?"

"I was wrecked once," said the Duke meditatively.

"I didn't know you had ever been a sailor."

"Neither have I."

"Do tell us about it."

"I was yachting in the South Pacific. It was a

large, comfortable steam yacht. We carried a French chef, and one evening, just as we were finishing dinner, we ran on to a reef and knocked a hole in the bottom. The weather was beautiful. She began to sink, however, and we all got into the boats and made for a tiny island, where we sat under two or three palm-trees in the moonlight. The French chef wept bitterly at his dinner having gone to the bottom. When day came the tide had receded and our vessel lay high and dry. We managed to mend the hole and we all helped to pump her dry, and when the tide came in she floated and we went on our way."

"It wasn't a very grand shipwreck."

"No, it was a quiet, gentlemanly affair. I believe some of the people worked it up—introduced a storm—all hands to the pumps—a raft and other accessories—but in reality it was as I told you."

"I don't think, Daddy," said Jenny reflectively, "you would have been at your best with a goat, a parrot and a man Friday."

Jenny thought she would never get to sleep amid the rattling of casements and the continuous roar outside, but she did, and slept soundly.

When she awoke the next morning the sun was shining in at the window—a glorious midsummer morning sun, rollicking in purple splendour from the east across a sea which had forgotten its rage of the night before, and now caressed the shore lovingly.

Jenny was young. She did not, as older people do, debate the advisability of early rising. She did not, like them, reflect that if she rose at six

she would be worn out at eleven, and regretting the necessity of foregoing the splendour of the morn, go to sleep again. She was, like all young people, generous of her strength and gave herself to life wherever she found it. She leapt from the bed and going to the window peeped through the blinds. She uttered a cry of delight. The tide was out. Miles and miles of golden sands and beyond the sea. The sea seemed the illimitable. Away to the left inland was an ocean of yellow gorse. She pulled up the blinds and threw the large windows wide open. Slipping off her night-gown, she stepped into the bath which lay in the middle of the room. What a world it was. There was always something new and wonderful to enjoy. In half an hour, to the surprise of an early housemaid, she was in the hall. She stepped out on to the verandah, and, descending the steps, ran across the lawn to the gate which opened on to the shore, heedless of the fact that her boots were immediately soaked in the dew-drenched grass. In another minute she was scampering across the sands to the sea. The delight of that first communion with it was never forgotten ; it never could be forgotten, being the prelude to so much music in her life. Scattered about the waste of sand were patches of rock, some low, lying half buried in sand, others quite formidable, and overhanging or enclosing pools in which she might have bathed. She debated doing so, but she was a child of the city, and a little afraid.

She wandered about, amazed at the life which she found in the crevices and pools. The innumerable crabs which seemed to go so

awkwardly, and yet covered the ground so quickly, the shrimps shooting in the clear, shallow water, and the thousands on thousands of limpets hiding their faces in the rock as if they had done something they were ashamed of. There were star-fish lying about the beach and jelly-fish taking all the colours of the rainbow in the morning sun.

She wandered on and on, till finally she was surprised, on looking at her watch, to see that it was half-past eight, and that from where she stood on the extreme point of a high rock the rectory was no longer visible.

She looked around with a quiet sense of enjoyment. They would guess where she was, and there was no need to hurry. She would rest and then go back. How delicious it was. The water ran gently in and out of a tiny bay at her feet. The incoming tide made the submerged seaweed sway with a graceful life. She wondered if the high tide in its comings and goings swept out the inhabitants of these miniature lakes or if the same families kept to the same spot. She knew that if you moved the limpet—an apparently inanimate and thoughtless creature—a mile from its home it would return and attach itself to the very spot from which it had been taken. She had read that somewhere.

Sitting on the edge of a rock she took courage and, pulling off her shoes and stockings, dipped her feet gingerly into the water below. It was colder than she had expected and she drew them up again with a little laugh. Then she allowed them to swing in the clear jade of the water.

She remembered, with a little gurgle of delight

at the absurdity of the contrast—fishing for tiddlers in St. James's Park with an eye on the alert for the unsympathetic park-keeper. How vast she had thought those waters.

As a child, she had seen many pictures of the sea, but they had never given her a hundredth part the measure of its illimitable glory. Those haze-veiled headlands drawn in soft, dream-like tones held all the beauty of the world. Far away, against the horizon, a steamer passed slowly down the channel. A light breeze stirred the heavy warmth of the midsummer morning, and a little sailing-boat, which had been rocking past her at a snail's pace, began to move with the quickening life of the wind in its sails.

The breeze fell after a few minutes, and Jenny watched the sails flap idly against the mast. Then they sank into the boat, and the figure—blue-jerseyed and red-capped—which had been sitting in the stern rose and began to pull back towards the headland.

Jenny put on her shoes and stockings and went back over the rocks. As she neared the sand she saw that the incoming waters had nearly cut her off. Indeed she was compelled to jump two or three newly created canals of varying width in order to reach safety. This gave quite a spice of adventure to the morning's outing. It was nearly ten o'clock when she ran up the garden path to find the Duke breakfasting on the verandah. He looked up with a smile.

"Up early?"

"It's been simply lovely."

Jenny sat down to breakfast chattering about

her adventures. Now and then her laugh, which had lost none of its beauty, rang out into the sunlight.

The change and the novelty had added a radiant freshness to her. The Duke could not help noting how utterly unspoilt her beauty was by her theatre experience.

A cat belonging to the establishment, which had hitherto kept out of sight—no doubt annoyed at the intrusion of strange people—looked up once or twice when she laughed, and finally deciding that she was a person to be encouraged, rose and rubbed himself against her dress. Jenny lifted him up and hugged him with the affection she felt for all things on that morning.

“I wish I had brought Toby.” Toby was her dachshund.

“Toby is better where he is, and he might become a beach-dog, and then not all the affection he has for you would hold him to his domestic duties.”

“What do you mean?”

“If you should see an unattached dog in a chronic state of dampness, and with a certain wild glare in the eye, don’t notice him or your life here will be a misery. He will never again leave you. If he follows you and lays a stone in a gentle, modest way at your feet, beware of him, his wiles are many. If you touch that stone you will let loose the devil in him. The air will be filled with maniacal shrieks of joy, and probably the six other beach-dogs which are always lurking somewhere at a seaside place will hear the signal that a victim has been found, and will appear in the offing, galloping to the hunt.”

Jenny laughed.

"Why, Daddy, what a long speech!"

"Oh, you don't know the beach-dog," he said, with mock melancholy in his voice.

How nice the Duke looked in his light homespun and a straw hat. How different he was from all other men of his age. He sat on the verandah smoking a cigarette, with his coffee beside him, and Jenny thought she had never seen him look so attractive. Why could they not always be together like this, on a summer morning by the sea, with Emma moving about in the house behind them. Why must all things have an end?

The Duke caught her eye fixed upon him, and she went over and sat by him, and passed her arm through his with a glad smile.

"Isn't it jolly, Daddy!"

"It's very, very nice."

She drew a little closer to him, and rubbed her cheek against his sleeve. The smell of the tweed and the cigarette were pleasant.

The Duke was happy, but he gave a little sigh. Perhaps he, too, was thinking how quickly things change, how soon for him things would change for ever.

"Must you go back on Monday, Daddy?"

"I am afraid so."

"What a nuisance!"

"And I shan't see you for five weeks."

"Oh dear!"

"It will be a nice rest."

"I don't think so."

There was silence for a minute or two. A score or so of people were dotted about the wide expanse of sand. The broad blue sea was in front, and

to their left a grove of pine-trees, through which the clear sky shimmered like azure water over the miles of gorse.

"Where shall I bathe, Daddy?"

"That is all arranged. A bathing-tent will be put up so that you can use it when you like. You notice, very few people come this side of the house."

"Fancy your thinking of a little thing like that."

"It's the most important thing of all when you're at the seaside. Next year, if we're alive, we'll go to Trouville."

"Is that nicer?"

"There is no such thing as a seaside place in England, from the point of view of gaiety. They are only fit for children."

"Then why didn't we go to Trouville?"

"Because, you know, Sir Eminent forbade it. We are here for rest. You may read novels."

"You know that any of those girls at the theatre would be bored to death in ten minutes here."

"I suppose they would. Does that mean you will be?"

"I hope not," laughed Jenny.

"You wouldn't like somebody to stay with you?"

"I don't think so. You know, Daddy, you mustn't think me a snob."

He laughed. "No. I don't think that; but we are all snobs, Jenny, in some way or other. Snobbishness originally meant the aping of gentility by vulgar folk. It now means the worship of conventional virtues. Riches and rank are the

chief conventional virtues, therefore snobbishness is used chiefly in relation to them." The Duke blew a whiff from his cigarette and added apologies for being pedantic.

"What is pedantic?" interrupted Jenny quickly.

"Being pedantic is the presence in your conversation of more words and erudition than is necessary for your meaning. I'm becoming a positive Dr. Johnson."

"Who's Dr. Johnson?"

"Jenny, you were to leave your studies behind you." And the Duke rose hastily.

"Who's Dr. Johnson?" insisted Jenny, laughing and holding on to his coat.

"Dr. Johnson was the most lovable Englishman who ever died—for I suspect his complete loveliness in life. He wrote a dictionary."

"Wrote a dictionary—how awful!"

"He was a soft-hearted bully, and he's a standing example of the superiority of character to achievement." He stopped.

"Go on," said Jenny, clapping her hands enthusiastically. "I don't know what it all means, but it sounds lovely." And, laughing like two children of the same age, they passed down into the garden.

Emma watched them from an upper window, wondering for the hundredth time at the strangeness of it all.

CHAPTER X

THE Duke left them, and Emma and Jenny settled down to a peaceful existence, which Jenny was a little surprised to find did not become in the least bit tedious. To Emma it was heaven. At Glamoy's Lodge, however courteous the Duke, and however smoothly things went, there was the taint of artificiality, and Jenny's daily departure for the theatre accentuated it. But here they were in a sense in their own home.

She and Jenny spent the pleasantest hours they had yet known together wandering by the sea-shore.

One evening Jenny passed a youth in tan boots, blue jersey and red cap running a small boat from the sands into the water. She stood for some time watching the little cockleshell as it gradually got under way. Then she remembered it was the same boat and youth she had seen the morning after her arrival. She was too much alive to be indifferent to the fact that the young man in the boat was well-built and handsome. There was something about him, too, which interested her, and the next day she found herself scanning the sea to see if the boat was anywhere about. It

was not, but a day or two afterwards she met the young man at closer quarters.

The High Street of Seaborough possessed a score or so of shops. They were nearly all of an old-fashioned, high-class kind, most especially Hibbert's, stationer and lending-library. The Miss Hibberts, the descendants of a long line of high-class stationers, presided over the business with the dignity and breeding of cultured gentlewomen, and Mrs. Goodchild had remarked to Jenny, on their first visit to obtain books, that it was a pity the type they represented was dying out.

Jenny liked going there, and was received by the Miss Hibberts with much favour. She usually spent quite a long time discussing books with them, and they spent a fair amount of time in discussing her, for she puzzled them, but they never connected her in any way with Jenny Oldcastle, the burlesque actress, although they knew the name well enough. Jenny always gave the name of Goodchild to the people in Seaborough.

One hot afternoon she went into Seaborough to change her books.

The bookshelves were at the back of the shop, and, with a smile at the Miss Hibberts, who were both engaged, Jenny passed through. She did not at first notice that someone else was choosing a book. A tall young figure was standing with its back to her, going through the volumes of Miss Braddon. As she laid down the books she had brought, the young man turned towards her and their eyes met. Jenny recognized him at once as the youth of the boat.

As is the way with two unacquainted young people whose hearts go fluttering when they meet, they made a studious pretence of ignoring each other. They ignored each other so persistently as to make it obvious, but in such cases there is a kind of inspired feeling that sooner or later an introduction is bound to come. The promised by heaven generally know each other at a glance. Jenny, having selected her books, passed into the outer shop and registered them at the counter.

The young man, with a novel in his hand, was behind her whilst she was doing this. At the moment of her departure she raised her eyes to his and looked at him gravely. She was not prepared for the effect of those blue eyes upon her, and in some confusion she let one of the books fall. He picked it up and for the fraction of a second their hands touched. In an ordinary way she was unconventional enough to have entered into conversation, but somehow this young man roused all that there was of Diana in her—and that was a great deal.

She walked home with a strange sense of joy. Why should this youth in the top-boots and jersey disturb her? Not that she objected to being disturbed. It was the surest sign of the sense of attraction she was suffering under that she let the thing have its way.

She looked for the boat more than ever, and now it was generally to be seen. Sometimes they passed each other. Once she was with Emma, who remarked on the exceeding good looks of the young man. He interested her very much and she turned to look at him. The next day there

was a light breeze and the cockleshell was early afloat.

Jenny did not bathe in the morning, but in the afternoon she went down to her tent at a moment when the tide was neither too high nor too low.

From her tent she could see the young man in his boat. The little skiff bobbed and ran over the waves like a seabird. Ever and anon the swaying of the white sail revealed the red speck which she knew to be a cap.

The little boat shot out to sea as she entered her bathing-tent. She dropped off her waterproof cloak and stepped out on to the sands. Without looking again in the direction of the boat, which she might have noticed was now nearer the shore, she ran across the strip of sand and entered the water. It was deliciously warm, and she set herself seriously to the work of developing her swimming. After a prolonged effort she rose to her feet triumphant. She had swum fully a dozen yards. She could swim, there was no doubt about it. She tried again and was again successful. This was splendid. She couldn't understand why she had been such a long time learning. It must surely be a mere question of acquiring the knack, for now it seemed singularly easy.

For some minutes she continued her experiments in order to make sure that there was no mistake. Then—she never remembered exactly what happened afterwards. All that she could recollect was that there was no longer any foothold, that she could not regain the ground, that around her the sea seemed to have become vast, and to be flowing

swiftly. She gave one piercing scream and sank. Then all around her was a wall of shining chryso-prase, through which she was being carried with incredible speed, the sound of thunder in her ears. Then again she was on the surface, struggling for breath. As she felt herself sinking something dark appeared to her blurred sight. A strong, cautious hand seized her bathing-dress by the collar at the back, and then she fainted. A few minutes later Emma, looking from an upstairs window, saw half a dozen people at the edge of the water. A couple of them waded quickly out, and the figure of a man staggered towards them with a burden in his arms.

The moment of that horror remained with her always. The wondering if it were Jenny's dead body which was being borne towards the house, and all that it meant if it should be so.

She met the procession half-way across the acres of smooth sand which lay between the house and the sea.

A boatman was offering to help the young fisherman who held Jenny in his arms.

"It's all right—I can manage. She's as light as a feather."

There was a shining in his eyes as he spoke, which Emma remembered afterwards. At the time she put it down to excitement.

"She's only fainted, you know," he gasped to Emma, as he came up to her.

"You are sure?"

"Quite; I got her before she went under the second time."

He staggered up the steps on to the verandah

and laid her on a lounge-chair. The group followed, and they all stood watching as Jenny came to with little sobs and gurgles, which, for all his reassuring statements, turned the youth in the fisherman's jersey white with apprehension. Emma, knowing more about fainting than he did, was quite comforted by these signs of vitality.

With a final splutter Jenny regained consciousness, and with a shuddering sob clutched Emma as in a vice.

"Emma, I was drowning—I was nearly drowned." She clung to her, unconscious of the group watching.

"I think she will be all right now," said Emma. "She ought to be taken to her room."

"I'll carry her," said the youth, who was standing in a pool of water on the stone floor of the verandah.

"Oh, thank you!"

He picked Jenny up as if she had been a feather-weight, and followed Emma through the dining-room into the hall, and upstairs.

"I really am all right now," protested Jenny weakly, but she made no effort to get upon her feet.

She really was much better by the time she reached her room, and was more or less able to look after herself.

Emma insisted on her deliverer taking off his wet things, and their being sent down to the kitchen fire, although he declared he was constantly wet through, and it was of no consequence.

Nevertheless, he allowed himself to be persuaded. Emma sent him a flannel petticoat, a pair of

stockings and a bath-gown to put on in the meanwhile. The effect was somewhat Japanese but quite decent.

In this costume he was asked a little later to come down and have some tea, and found Jenny in an exquisite frock of white serge, looking still a little pale, but otherwise quite recovered.

He came just inside the door and stopped in surprise, having expected only to find Emma. He was not at all sure that he would have consented to appear before Jenny, at what he considered to be a great disadvantage. As a matter of fact, although Jenny laughed, and he laughed, and finally they all three laughed with the greatest enjoyment at his quaint appearance, he looked singularly handsome.

Emma, who had at first taken him for a fisherman, had realized her mistake on hearing his voice. Now she was looking at him curiously, with that vague wonder which comes over people when they meet someone who is of special meaning.

"I am afraid I look an awful sight, don't I?"

"You look quite nice." And the colour came back into Jenny's cheeks from the exhilarating effect of her laughter.

"My name is Burne. Sir Alaric Burne."

There was a silence. The young man stood by the door looking at Emma and she at him. The far-off shout of some lad down the long waste of shore came to them through the hot afternoon sunlight. Then Emma, her heart beating wildly and with a ghastly smile round her mouth, managed to get past him out of the room. She murmured something about seeing that his

clothes were dried. Strange to say, neither Sir Alaric nor Jenny noticed the extraordinary shock which his name had been to her. They were too much occupied with each other.

“ You’ve saved my life.”

“ Oh, nonsense ! ”

“ It isn’t nonsense. At least, my life isn’t nonsense to me. I think it’s most important.”

“ Of course you know I didn’t mean that. I meant that anyone might have done it if they had happened to be there.”

“ I don’t see that. People don’t always save people who are drowning.”

“ Those who can swim do.”

“ You must swim very well. Did I struggle ? ”

“ Just for a second. I don’t know what I should have done if you had struggled much.”

“ Would you have let go ? ”

Their eyes met. They both coloured and the question went unanswered.

The maid brought in the tea.

“ Mrs. Goodchild hopes you will not wait for her, miss.”

Alaric glanced up in surprise.

Knowing Emma’s dislike to strangers, Jenny did not attach importance to her absence. She was a little surprised, however, at Emma having gone away without thanking Alaric. She was puzzled, and now remembered how suddenly she had left the room.

She seated herself at the tea-table.

“ Do you take sugar ? ”

“ Oh, a lot.”

“ What do you mean by a lot ? ”

"Three lumps."

"Big ones?"

"A big one, a medium one, and a little one."

They both laughed with childish appreciation. They were in the mood to see gaiety in all things.

Jenny had quite recovered and was feeling hungry. They sat on each side of the table eating buttered toast and cake as if they had known each other all their lives, but with a vague sensation of miracle around them which lifelong friendships do not bring.

He thought her the prettiest girl he had ever seen. He had not the remotest idea of her identity, and would have been amazed to hear that she was a burlesque actress.

She had that in her voice which he was accustomed to in the women he knew—the vocal atmosphere of class which no ugliness of tone can destroy. Her manner was perhaps just a little masterful and broad for so young a girl; but it seemed to add distinction. Perhaps she was an heiress. He knew an heiress who had something of this self-reliance—but she was not beautiful.

Jenny thought it great fun, sitting down to tea with someone who believed her to be just an ordinary girl.

"This is a jolly nice cake."

"You really like it?"

"Rather."

"And you're not saying it out of politeness?"

"Not in the least."

"There, I made it," said Jenny triumphantly, "and cook said it would be like lead."

"She's jealous. It's as light as it can be."

"So I told her."

They went over the adventure again and again. Every detail of it was fascinating to them.

"Supposing I had gone under three times, and you had dived and hadn't been able to find me!"

"I say, don't be gruesome!" He turned a little pale. The idea of that sweet face being borne away in the green depth of the sea made him shiver. "I must have some more cake. You've quite upset me."

"I'm so sorry." Jenny cut a huge slice, quite flattered to see her handiwork so much appreciated.

Alaric munched it contentedly, looking round the room.

Suddenly a photograph on a side-table caught his eye.

"I say, what a ripping photograph."

It was a photograph of Jenny, taken in a simple muslin frock, looking her loveliest. There were no theatrical photographs in the room, and she was glad of it. The note of the theatre would have seemed out of the chord. She had never before felt this swift dislike to her professional atmosphere.

"Do you like it?" she asked.

"It's exactly like a picture. At least, it's exactly like you and a picture too."

"It is a good one, but then they always take the best photographs."

Jenny realized after she had spoken how full of suggestion the remark was. She was about to say, "I am an actress," but something kept her silent.

He looked at her curiously. He, too, felt that the remark required explanation, but had not the knowledge of life to know why. He could only ask :

“ Do you often have your photograph taken ? ”

“ Fairly often.”

Sir Alaric looked thoughtful. The people he knew had their photographs taken about once or two or three years, and a great many of them not that.

“ Do you know, I’ve never had my photograph taken in my life, but then I’m not good-looking.”

“ Aren’t you ? I should have said you were.”

Sir Alaric laughed.

“ It’s very nice of you to say that, but you needn’t, you know. I don’t think it matters whether a fellow is good-looking or not, so long as he can take care of himself.”

It was one of those pseudo-manly generalities which English boys are brought up to repeat, parrot-like, and which are absolutely false.

Jenny looked thoughtful. She was apt to examine remarks for what they were worth.

“ I think looks tell even in a man.” She paused, and then added : “ Of course, looks tell just as much as any other gift, whether in a man or a woman.”

“ I suppose you’re right, but one never thinks of it——”

“ That’s an awfully nice little boat of yours.”

“ Isn’t she—she’s like a bird. I wish——” he stopped and flushed a little.

“ Well ? ”

“ I was going to be rather cheeky, I’m afraid.”

“ Why ? ”

“ I was going to say that I wish you would let me take you for a sail.”

“ Why shouldn't you ? ”

Again he felt a little surprised. He was too bewildered and fascinated by her charm to think the least evil, but her independence and frankness were a note to which he was not accustomed in girls of her age. The freedom about her almost startled him.

“ May I ? ”

“ I should love it. I know I'm a good sailor, because I've been out on a rough sea.”

Alaric felt a twinge of jealousy. He longed to ask with whom it was she had gone a-sailing.

“ The old boatman who took me out said I was a born sailor.”

“ If you'll trust yourself with me, I'll take no end of care of you.”

“ If it's rough I'll wear oilskins and a sou'-wester, shall I ? I should like to sing a song in oilskins and a sou'-wester.”

“ Sing a song—— ? ”

He was not allowed to finish—Jenny simply dodged the question.

“ Have some more cake.”

At that moment the maid came in to say that the gentleman's clothes were quite dry.

Alaric drank his tea, and ran upstairs, leaving Jenny to reflect seriously.

When he came down in his blue fisherman's jersey with his hair brushed he looked so handsome that Jenny's heart gave a jump.

As for Alaric, every time he looked at her she

grew more dazzling. Her glitter passed through him like sunlight.

He remembered his manners, and took up his cap.

Jenny, with true feminine artfulness, did not say "Oh, don't go," but kept him talking about one thing and the other for quite a long time. Sir Alaric paused before a photograph of the Duke.

"I say, what a handsome old chap." He bent forward and looked at the signature, "Father."

"Is that your father?"

Then Jenny did a thing which she could never afterwards quite explain. She answered "Yes, that's Daddy" and left it at that.

"May I look at it?" He lifted the Duke's photograph off the table.

"I say, he does look a swell, doesn't he? Have you any brothers and sisters?"

"No, and no mother."

Alaric laid the portrait down. "I haven't a father or a mother. I can't even remember them."

"That's very sad, isn't it?"

"Yes, I suppose it is; but my aunt is an awfully good sort."

They went on to the verandah and stood for a few minutes after he had shaken hands, and then shook hands again. Then they went down to the garden gate and stood there in the growing dusk.

With strong steps he struck out across the sand to where his boat lay.

Jenny stood watching him as he disappeared into the twilight till he became a shadow passing over purple patches of wet sand, a ghost moving

against the white-lipped violet of the evening sea.

Above, Emma also strained her eyes to follow his fading figure. Her son, whom she had schooled herself never even to attempt to see. Oh, the music of it, the music which had so much of pain in it—the deep chords of which were an agony.

CHAPTER XI

JENNY was so happy that she hardly thought of anything but herself and Alaric. The eternally recurring miracle had been wrought, and she was in its midst.

"You know, Mummy, it was very lucky he was about. I might have been drowned."

Emma forced a smile.

"You would have been, to a certainty." She would see that vision till her dying day, although she had not been a witness of it. The two beings she loved most on earth struggling for life in the deep waters.

"Do you know, Mummy, I heard him say once—I don't know how I heard, but I did—'I can't do it, I can't do it. Oh, my God, help me!'"

Poor Jenny's voice suddenly broke. She had been too excited till now to remember this part of it. She put down her knife and fork and came over to Emma, throwing her arms round her neck with that curious childish unconsciousness which was so irresistible to the older woman. Emma felt her tears wet against her own cheek.

"Wasn't it awful, Mummy! Supposing it had happened?"

She clung closer, and Emma held her with a sudden, virile strength. After a minute Jenny went back to her seat.

"Do you like him, Mummy?"

"Yes——" A pause, then with a little decided nod of her head, wholly artificial, had Jenny known—"Yes, I like him very much."

"I'm so glad. We'll ask him to tea again." Then suddenly, with a terrible thump of her heart, Jenny remembered what she had said about the Duke's photograph. For a moment she felt almost sick at the thought of what she had done. She had not till now realized its full meaning. She had said "Yes, that's Daddy," almost as a joke, and now she realized what it meant to have left the statement uncontradicted. She sat staring with wide-open eyes till Emma asked her if she were ill. She pulled herself together and managed to finish the meal without arousing any further questions. Then she went and walked up and down the garden path in the moonlight and thought the matter out. At least, she did not think it out, because she soon found that reflection on the subject was a circular tour, and that she always returned to the same place.

It was with a terrible sense of disloyalty to the Duke that she realized that there had come a time when, to say the least of it, their relations stood in the way.

She would not care to tell Sir Alaric that she was a burlesque actress living under the Duke's protection. She knew the Duke called her his ward, and

so far she had never cared in the least what people said. Innuendoes without number she had heard, but the whole situation had been such a promotion for her that it had never occurred to her that a time could arrive when its disadvantages might appear to outweigh its advantages.

She was beginning to realize the importance of the unknown quantity, not so much of the unforeseen as that which experience has not taught us to foresee.

What a difficult world it had become. But for the Duke she would never have met Alaric. So far, however, she would not have foregone the Duke for Alaric. Yet the very fact of her being with the Duke made the friendship of which it was the result difficult.

If they met again he must be told. Perhaps in the meantime he would find out.

This thought was the most torturing of all.

As she undressed an idea struck her. She would simply say to him laughingly :

"By the way, did you think the portrait of the Duke of Glamoy's was a portrait of my father?"

He would look at her inquiringly and she would go on :

"It struck me you might think so, as I called him Daddy. I am an actress at the Oddities, you know, and he adopted me. He is the Duke of Glamoy's."

Then Jenny's sense of humour came to the rescue, and for all her worry she laughed. She had heard equally ridiculous explanations, and she had seen them received with apparent

credulity, but only in the presence of the person who delivered them.

She went to sleep, however, with that optimism on the subject which is one of the compensations which Nature allows us at the end of the day and which is her narcotic.

Always to-morrow the miracle will happen.

CHAPTER XII

JENNY awoke the next morning with the knowledge that her life had changed. She could think of nothing but Alaric Burne. She looked out of her window, almost sure that she would see the little boat, early as it was ; and it was with that sharp sense of pain which the smallest disappointments bring when we are in the process of falling in love that she looked east and west in vain.

She breakfasted alone. Emma was indisposed and remained in bed.

The truth of the matter was that the poor distracted mother had paced her room through the long night in a mental agony impossible to describe. All that she had schooled herself to forget had come upon her overwhelmingly.

She had accepted ostracism and oblivion as her punishment. She had been glad for her son's sake that it should be so, and now—how handsome he was !—how everything she had dreamed he might be when he lay a babe a few days old at her side ! That he should have come to this splendid manhood unaided by her, with no memories

of her, with no deep, abiding instinct of gratitude to her for life and care! She was obliged to choke back the sobs which convulsed her. The abandonment of grief in the silence of her own room was terrible. Her window was wide open, and the night, framed like a picture, faced her, a melancholy nocturne. An orange moon rolled across a violet sky, and a golden way shimmered over the wet sand. Tense, with clenched fingers, Emma sat and watched the coming of dawn. She saw the pearl-grey flush with rose, the sheaf of fiery spears flash over the horizon, the splendour and the glory of the morning.

No woman had ever been more severely punished for a fault never really committed. She wondered if her son thought her dead. No one had ever told her. There had been no one to tell her. She had done what she thought best for the boy and had disappeared.

Jenny came to her, and found her in a darkened room, asking only to be left alone.

"No tea, Mummy?"

"Well, just a cup of tea."

This was said more to save argument, but Jenny brought the tray herself and fussed a little to show she was sympathetic, and then left Emma lying with the drawn blinds gently waving in the sunlit breeze.

Jenny had intended to ask Emma's advice about the incident of the Duke's photograph, or rather, she persuaded herself that she had so intended. At any rate, the moment was not propitious, and she afterwards felt a little aggrieved, quite sure that had Emma been well she

would have told her and that all subsequent difficulties would have been avoided. People become very sophistical when they are in love. Jenny finished her breakfast, and having made sure that Emma wanted but to be left alone, set out for a walk along the shore. She carried a book, her intention, so she assured herself in a whirl of self-deception quite unusual with her, being to seek out a quiet spot and spend the morning reading.

But the quiet spot was apparently difficult to find. She wandered along by the margin of the sea, where she was well in evidence.

There was no sign of Sir Alaric. Jenny wondered if the events of yesterday had meant nothing to him, whether he had forgotten. No, he had asked her to go a-sailing with him. He would hardly have done so if he had never meant to see her again. However, she did not care. It didn't really matter. All the same, the summer sea grew a little leaden and there came a chill into the balminess of the breeze. How empty the morning seemed. She would go back and bathe. No, she would walk on to the headland. She had never been so far.

Then her heart gave a great thump, and she wondered who it was had just come down from the cliff some way ahead of her.

Of course it was Alaric coming towards her. Her heart fluttered wildly, ecstatically—as did his also, had she but known it. We never credit the beloved with as much passion as we experience ourselves. Be it man or woman, the lover always rejoices in giving something more than is received.

Just because lovers are wise enough to know

the value of the game of love-making, she pretended not to see him, but walked away towards the margin of the sea.

When she had done this she was overcome with fear lest he should think she was avoiding him and was not desirous of his company. He, however, came after her. He was so happy at finding her that he forgot to be self-conscious, and quite believed she hadn't seen him.

"I say—am I in the way?"

"Oh no!"

"I wondered if I should see you."

He was quite frank. He was not a girl, and did not think his market value would be enhanced by an affectation of coyness. He had come to find her, and he told her so.

He turned back with her, and they fell into conversation at once.

Alaric introduced his rough-haired terrier Dingo, who was duly patted. Dingo gave a wriggle from his head downward, which ended in a prolonged waggle of his tail, by way of showing his appreciation.

Alaric Burne was singularly fresh. At twenty-two he had had no sex experience, a much rarer thing than is generally admitted. It was the more singular in his case because he had a full appetite for sensation, but it simply happened that for many reasons he had not become fully aware that the meal of life was served. He had, for all his present radiant health, been an invalid for a good many years.

"You wouldn't think it, would you?" he said, in telling her of this. "My aunt always thought

I should peg out. Then all of a sudden I came to, as it were, but it was rather late in the day."

"How was it managed?"

"My aunt found a doctor who said, 'Cut medicine, and let him run about bare-footed and bare-headed. It'll kill or cure him.' She took the risk, and here I am."

"Yes, you're very much here," laughed Jenny. "I don't think I ought to go any further," she added.

"Why not?"

"Emma—Mrs. Goodchild, might not like my going so far without her."

She had never till now felt any diffidence at going miles by herself, but somehow her instinct prompted her to make the remark to Alaric.

Then she pulled herself together. She must tell him that the Duke was not her father. She must let him know who she really was. The matter must be settled once and for all.

Somehow, however, she did not tell him. She allowed the golden morning to slip away. Perhaps he would have tea with them that day, or the next, and then Emma would say something which would show him the true state of the case. Then if he chose not to come again—At this thought the morning became a little less golden. As a matter of fact, she would not at all have liked the truth to come out in this way, but she was concerned in delaying the moment of revelation. Her feeling that Alaric was so far a conventionalist—indeed, that he had had no chance of being anything else, and would regard the whole situation as an insurmountably unpleasant one—was growing.

He was the last person in the world with whom she could insist that she was the Duke's ward. He must either accept the statement or leave it. If it killed her, she could not have attempted to prove the truth to him.

Their conversation turned to the conduct of some girls whom they passed, and who, accompanied by some young men, were behaving rowdily.

"I've seen those girls about often," she said. "They're pretty, aren't they?"

"Flashy sort of creatures. Actresses, I should think."

Alaric had been to the theatre but very few times, and he had the most elementary notions of what an actress was in regard to the social system. At any rate, he would have considered it quite impossible for any belonging of his own to be such a thing. In 1880 only half a dozen actresses had any sort of position, and young men of Sir Alaric's class did not encounter them as a social factor.

"Don't you think an actress might be quite nice?"

"Oh yes; in her way."

"What do you mean, 'in her way'?"

It struck him as being a little curious that she should start a serious discussion on the subject.

"Well, they're not quite the sort of people you want about."

Jenny was not indignant. She knew that he was only repeating the shibboleths of a class which never comes into contact with the stage, and knows nothing about it. She did not pursue the

subject. They wandered back, the morning having passed in an incredibly short space of time.

He left her at the gate. They were both—without being aware of it—watched by the woman at the window.

Alaric and Jenny were now in that state of mind when every moment spent away from each other was a fever of anxiety.

Jenny lived with her eyes on the long line of shore. Alaric haunted the village, the cliffs, and the sea.

They always met in the morning, and once or twice he came in to tea.

He thought it somewhat strange that Mrs. Goodchild should never spend more than a few minutes with them, and that she always rose and left them on the plea of having something urgent to attend to. Had Alaric been more sophisticated it would have struck him as being still more peculiar. Jenny, by this time in a fever as to what she should do, was becoming more and more hopelessly involved in the lie every day. To a nature as naturally frank and truthful as hers, the situation was bewildering. She did not recognize herself in the girl who was building up such tissues of invention, compelled to build them up or to come swiftly to a confession which appalled her, not so much because of what she had to tell, although that was bad enough, but because of the deception she had practised. She despised herself utterly.

When she was alone with Alaric she forgot about it, and gave herself up to the delight of falling deeper and deeper in love.

All the formalism which she had been intent on acquiring went overboard. Had he been a rich young man about town who had stopped her at the stage-door it would have been the same thing. She had fallen in love.

There were no compromises, no desire that he should be any different, no half-uttered thought that things were impossible because of this or that. She gave herself to him unreservedly, although he had never whispered a word of love to her. She was his, his to make or mar, to do what he liked with, and she gloried in her vassalage. She wondered if those young girls who used to wander away from Dean's Court with the lover's arm ostentatiously round their waist felt as she did now. Ginger had wanted to behave like that. He had wanted her to belong to him, and she had laughed. She felt sorry for Ginger now.

Yet Sir Alaric was utterly unlike the man she had always thought she would marry.

He was to have been at least thirty. He was to have been tall and stately. Dignity, the thing Jenny prized most in life, was to have been his dominant characteristic.

Sir Alaric was dignified and he was handsome, but in quite a different way. His hair was almost the colour of mahogany ; his lips were red, and he had no moustache.

She laughed when she thought how different all this was from what she had pictured to herself. She had fallen in love with a youth, a thing she had always thought undignified, and yet she would not have had it otherwise. He told her all about himself by degrees.

"My mother left my father when I was quite a baby ; and no one knows where she is."

He did not spring this confidence upon her abruptly ; it came into their conversation as they were sitting on the far rocks at low tide

He had been telling her how he had lived with his aunt since he was three years old.

"She's been wonderfully good to me. I was an awful little crock, as I told you, and must have been a howling nuisance."

It was on this that Jenny had asked about his mother.

"My father died soon after she left him."

"He must have felt it terribly."

Alaric looked thoughtful.

"I don't know. I don't think so. I say—I'm afraid he drank. It all sounds rather dreadful, doesn't it ? "

Now was Jenny's chance. Against such a record she could play her own card, but she looked at Alaric's frank, well-bred face, and felt that somehow she would be in the wrong. What she had heard did not in any way bring Alaric down to the level of what he would deem her to be. She let the opportunity pass, if opportunity it were.

Every day the situation grew more difficult. Again and again she tried to tell him. As she lay down in her bed at night it seemed a simple thing to do. It was absurd to make such a difficulty of it. He would understand. Yes, she would tell him all about it as they walked together round Boulder Point and into Safety Cove. She had nothing to be ashamed of. Surely he would not think the worst of her. He would believe. Oh

yes, it would all be quite easy, and she would sink to sleep comforted.

In the morning, however, she would remember the conversation they had had about actresses, and his grotesque conception of them. The stupid lie would swell to its true proportions, perhaps beyond them, and weigh down her soul with horror. She was courageous; but once she found herself whimpering, and pitying herself for having got into such a tangle. She realized what the confession would mean to him. She could see him leaving her, going away up the cliff-path out of sight for ever, and she alone below with a broken heart.

Terrified into silence by such a prospect, she allowed the days to drift by, enjoying her happiness, and hardly daring to peep into the near future where stood Nemesis

CHAPTER XIII

THEY went picnicking together more than once. Alaric made the fire and fetched the winkles, and Jenny boiled the water and made the tea. Then she produced cut bread-and-butter, cakes and jam-sandwiches. No meals had ever tasted half so good to either of them as these teas eaten under the great, jagged rocks, with the afternoon sun throwing long shadows across the clean, white sand. Dingo imparted comedy to the proceedings by circling round the teacloth and sitting up for tit-bits.

Dogs and animals must wonder why human beings require such an amount of food, whilst they are so strictly dieted.

After tea Alaric would light a cigarette and lean back, with his cap, if he happened not to be in sailing kit, tilted over his eyes. Once Jenny read to him a short story by Ouida, "A Dog of Flanders," and Alaric at the end of it, who was fond enough of Dingo at all times, was seized with an access of sentimental affection and nearly squashed the life out of him. Dingo, when released, with characteristic sweetness of nature, stood on the

sands and wagged his tail to show that even such violence of affection left no bad feeling. Then of a sudden he grew hysterical, and treated the patch of sand between the rocks as if it had been a circus, tearing round and round at full speed, till he made them so giddy that Alaric threw his cap at him.

"Poor Dingo, did they throw a nasty cap at him?" and Jenny in her turn hugged him to her bosom.

At one of these picnics they had their first serious quarrel. How it came about was difficult to say. Everything had gone quite smoothly, when, all of a sudden, they found themselves in the midst of it, with Jenny, very dignified and quiet, putting away the tea-things, whilst Alaric, with tight lips and a flushed face, stood moodily by.

"I'm sorry," said Alaric jerkily and rather defiantly, although what he was sorry about he had no very clear idea.

"Really!" said Jenny, straining at the strap of the tea-basket, as if it presented difficulties.

"Let me do that."

"No thank you." She fixed the strap and raised the basket.

"You can't possibly carry it."

"I am going to carry it"—a strong emphasis on the "going."

"I shan't let you."

But Jenny had the basket, and when he touched it she said, "Don't do that, please," in such a tone that he was compelled to let go.

"Good-bye, Sir Alaric." She moved off quickly, leaving him petrified with alarm.

She had gone about a hundred yards when his eye fell upon a book. She had forgotten her novel. This, at any rate, gave him an excuse for following.

For all her apparent dignity, Jenny would have given anything to turn back, but of course, as she was the girl, that was impossible.

Then she heard him running; no doubt he was hurrying after her to apologize.

"I beg your pardon," he said very stiffly, "but you have forgotten your book."

"Oh, thank you."

He did not apologize, but stood there without speaking, and it was impossible for Jenny to move on without seeming brutal.

Somehow, however, they did leave each other, and Jenny, with a sinking heart, felt that there must be at least two hundred yards between them.

Then she realized that Dingo was with her, keeping close by her side.

"Go back, Dingo," she said quietly, but Dingo declined, and in answer to further commands to return to his master, rolled over on his back with his four legs in the air, where he remained gazing at her with supernaturally solemn eyes, as if to say—"You can't get the better of this."

Alaric's whistle, at first casual and spasmodic, was now heard. Dingo took just as much notice as showed he had heard it.

"Go back, Dingo!"

Dingo, evidently quite sure of his line of conduct, did not move.

Alaric's whistle now grew stern and insistent. There is nothing calculated to make one look

so ridiculous as one's dog when he follows the enemy.

Jenny hurried on, and Dingo, as if to say, "For heaven's sake, let us escape—this way for your life," hurried on ahead of her.

Jenny stopped. Alaric's whistle grew nearer; he was evidently in pursuit, ostensibly of Dingo, perhaps of her.

He appeared with a face full of wrath at his humiliation, and, making a dive at Dingo, seized him angrily by the collar and raised a whittled hazel switch he was carrying.

"If you touch Dingo, I'll never speak to you again."

"I thought you weren't going to do that in any case."

Jenny ignored this allusion to her inconsistency.

"I wouldn't revenge myself on a dog."

"Who's revenging himself? I'm punishing him."

"What for?"

"Disobedience."

"At any rate, he isn't rude. He has the good manners to see me home."

"I said I was sorry."

With true feminine tact and so as to avoid too much concession, Jenny put the basket down and began to exercise her wrist as if it ached.

Alaric made for the basket.

"I told you it was too heavy."

In his hurry he tripped over a piece of tough seaweed and measured his length. This built a little bridge of laughter.

"That's a punishment," said Jenny.

"All right. I'm punished," assented Alaric, rubbing his leg, which was quite unhurt, in order to be sure of sympathy sufficient to carry him back into favour.

By the time they reached the house the quarrel was entirely forgotten, but the incident left Jenny more than ever wretched. Who was she, she asked herself, to complain of anybody's conduct? She was a miserable, underbred, deceiving little gutter-snipe, and her true breed was finding her out.

CHAPTER XIV

EMMA watched her son with greedy eyes. Whenever she could obtain a sight of him without being seen she would stand at her bedroom window, a pair of field-glasses in her hand. She saw him descend the path from the cliff-top to the sea-shore, and she saw Jenny come out of the group of rocks at the base of the headlands to meet him. Sometimes she watched them as they sauntered through the hot afternoons by the edge of the sea, now and then running in shore as some wave, more ambitious or playful than its fellows, flowed far inland.

Sometimes the hour passed when he should have appeared at the cliff-top, and then, half an hour later, the little sailing-boat would come bobbing and curtseying round the further headlands, and Emma's soul would rejoice as well as Jenny's.

Emma had such confidence in Jenny, had known her so well under such very definite temptation, that these meetings of which she was supposed to be ignorant did not alarm her at all.

They did not alarm her until she noticed

feverishness about Jenny's happiness, a strain of suffering which ought not to have been there.

Then she became alarmed, and began to wonder if she had been mistaken in Alaric. She knew that quite nice boys, otherwise full of good-nature, will break a girl's life with all the unconsciousness of a child tearing up a rag-doll, and be quite ignorant of the harm they have done till, with the poor fragments before them, come bitter, unavailing regrets.

She was, however, enlightened as to the cause of Jenny's unhappiness, for on the evening of the picnic and the quarrel she was astonished to hear sobbing in Jenny's room. She went to her at once, and Jenny poured out the whole story.

Emma saw how a real tragedy for the girl had grown out of a momentary weakness.

"There is only one way out of it, Jenny," she said gently.

"Yes." Jenny was too clear-headed not to have grasped this. It was just this palpable fact before which she had recoiled.

Then for a space Emma could only remember that it was her son who had been deceived, and she broke out into a harshness of tone Jenny had never heard from her before.

"It was cruel to deceive a nature like his, cruel. You shouldn't have done it."

For all her self-possession and curious deliberation of mind, Jenny could be terrified by the idea of losing the affection of those she thought belonged to her. Emma was only made aware of how she had spoken by finding a pair of arms

round her neck, clasped tightly as if their owner feared she might fly away for ever.

"Don't. I can't bear it if you turn against me."

The words were little, the passionate pathos in them was all. Jenny had suffered too much the last few days not to feel utterly forlorn at the idea of her chief refuge thrusting her away.

Emma was not proof against this display of outraged confidence.

"I am sorry, Jenny; I didn't quite mean that; but it must be put right, and at once."

"Yes"—in a low, strained voice.

"It is just one of those things which makes everything look black.

"He will think me bad and wicked." From the way Jenny said this it was obvious that her whole happiness was bound up in Alaric thinking otherwise.

"He has known you long enough for that to be impossible."

"The longer I've known him the worse it makes it." The reply was typical of Jenny's mode of thought. She was not apt to spare herself.

"I feel dreadful." Jenny nestled her head against Emma's side.

"But when a man loves a woman——"

Jenny started as if she had been shot. The words thrilled her with a magnetic shock. To hear Emma say this was music.

"Emma, I never said——"

"But of course he does," said Emma, with a low, musical laugh. She was just beginning to see the full beauty of it from her point of view.

There had been a recompense prepared for her. The care of her boy's love, perhaps of his wife, had been given into her hands. It was passing strange and wonderful.

It was so wonderful that for the moment her mind had passed the quagmire into which Jenny's unpremeditated deception had brought them and was in the beyond. Just for the moment she forgot everything but the possibility of holding their children in her arms, and her heart burned at the thought.

Jenny thought she was trying to find a way out of the difficulty, and left her in silence for a little, looking out into the deep violet of the summer night.

At last she asked gently :

"What made you think that Sir Alaric——?"

Emma smiled into the darkness.

"I have seen it in his face."

Emma forgot for the moment how she had avoided Alaric. She faced it, however.

"I have watched you together more than you have known."

For a moment Jenny was hurt. She had not been trusted; she had been watched. This was just what her nature could not brook. In spite of her guilt she asked a little sharply :

"You have been watching us?"

"Yes, in a way," was the reply. Then Emma went on: "I knew Sir Alaric's mother in the old days. She was a friend of mine, and I am interested in him."

Jenny sat up. In all her acquaintance with Emma she had never received so much confidence.

Of course she had always known that Emma was of the best breed ; the more she had seen of the right people the more she had realized this.

She waited for her to go on. Perhaps something exciting was coming.

Emma, however, did not say anything further, and Jenny was compelled to follow it up.

"Is that why you were so angry just now?"

"Perhaps." Then, with energy, Emma added : "Tell him the truth at once, Jenny. When a man loves a woman, he longs to believe the best of her. It will be difficult at first, but truth rides down every obstacle. Go to Alaric."

At the way in which Emma spoke the name Alaric Jenny gave a slight movement which showed that she was surprised.

"Tell him that you have deceived him, and tell him why. If you tell him yourself he will believe you. If he finds out from others he never will. Tell him yourself, Jenny."

This was beyond Jenny. It ought not to have been, considering her strength of mind, but it was, and she said so.

"You must, Jenny, you must," reiterated Emma. Then she took the girl in her arms and said pleadingly : "Don't break his heart, don't break his heart."

"Oh, when he knows who I am, and what people say about me, he will despise me."

"At first, perhaps."

Emma talked to her for a long time, trying in every way she could think of to strengthen her. She saw the hidden motive in Jenny's deception, the reason she had hardly confessed to herself,

the fact that she could not, because she was a woman, forego the joy of hearing him say that he loved her before she told the truth. Instinct had warned her during their first conversations that he would have looked on her with totally different eyes had he known the truth. Emma also realized this, but as woman to woman she knew it was the thing to be kept in the background.

She left her at last, Jenny having promised to try and tell Alaric.

Emma had much to examine herself on. She was trying to analyse her conduct from the point of view of an outsider.

How little she knew of her son. How little she had been content to know. No, content was not the word. It was truer to say that she had schooled herself not to know. In the years past she had suffered acutely at this divorce between herself and her natural functions as mother, but time blunts the edge of all sorrow. It must be so, or we could not live. Till her boy had stepped again into her life, bearing Jenny in his arms, she had been firm in her intention to let things remain as they were.

She wondered what her husband's sister—not the least of her trials during her short married life—was like nowadays. She had been some years older than her brother. She must be nearly sixty now. Perhaps she had grown softer with time. Alaric did not talk or look as if he had been brought up by a hard woman. She had heard him talking to Jenny in the evening twilight whilst she had sat at the other end of the verandah, and

he seemed to be quite happy at home. Emma was too big to resent this, as some mothers who had gone out into the wilderness might have done.

She looked out of her window towards the head-land, which lay a black mass in the moonlight. On the other side of it dwelt Alaric and her sister-in-law. She knew Miss Burne too well not to be sure that there would be the most strenuous objection to anything like an engagement between Alaric and Jenny. Emma could quite appreciate all the objections, if with her greater experience of the many strata of Society they did not appear as great as they might have done in former days.

Behind nearly all our actions there is some personal motive unconfessed, often not even self-revealed, and Emma saw that for Alaric to marry Jenny would mean that in a sense her son would be given back to her, even if he should never know who she was.

Then, with true feminine sophistry she declared that there was no need for him ever to know who she was, even if it should be necessary to reveal the truth to Miss Burne.

She was quite ignorant as to what they had told Alaric about her. Perhaps they had led him to believe she was dead. She did not know how much Alaric had told Jenny of his life, for with her usual reticence Jenny had repeated practically none of his confidences,

CHAPTER XV

AS for Alaric, he was quite sure that Jenny was the only girl in the world for him. He had always been impressionable, and had fallen in love in a boyish way with many of his aunt's visitors. But with Jenny he felt it was different, and he was right. He was just at the age when men fall in love most easily and most strongly.

She had stirred the manhood within him. He felt ashamed of the aimlessness of his life and of being so tied to his aunt's apron-strings. He had never thought of it before. He had been dependent upon her from childhood. He had seen so little of the life of other youths. Owing to his health it was only of late that he had blossomed into the young man of promise. He was feeling his feet years later than other young men of his age. He was determined to speak to his aunt about Jenny. He made up his mind to do this as he wandered home along the shore in the late evening.

He was in no hurry to reach home. If his aunt wondered why he was constantly away towards Seaborough she did not question him, quite realizing

that he was now too old for that. She made guesses, of course, and even wondered if the attraction were the girl he had picked out of the water. Of the full measure of his conduct on that occasion she had no idea. He had described it as quite a trivial affair. "My boat was there, you know, and I had to wade a bit." She didn't know that he had risked his life to save Jenny. He had described her in such a way as to convey the impression of a gentlewoman.

"The old father looks no end of a swell. Like some old duke, or like what an old duke ought to be."

"He was there as well, then?"

"Oh, no. She showed me his photograph."

"Does he do anything?"

"I don't know—I shouldn't think so. Doesn't look like it. They seem to have no end of money. Seems to manage her own money in a funny sort of way."

Miss Burne laughed. "What do you mean by 'a funny sort of way'?"

"Rather like a grand duchess."

"I didn't know you knew any."

"I don't, but that's what she's like."

Miss Burne reflected that Alaric's estates could do very well with an heiress.

The whole acquaintance sounded all right. Alaric would not have talked of it so openly had it not been quite respectable. She would have offered to call, but she knew that young people do not always like their friendships intruded upon by their elders and that it is unwise to be premature.

Perfectly happy when he was thinking of his love for Jenny, he would clamber out to a far rock, and, perching himself above the waters, give himself up to dreams ; and as he sat looking at the glory of the west the full joy of it would come upon him. The opal sea lapped at the rocks, making low music in the serene evening air. Behind him the cliffs threw lengthening shadows, and over the western waves the sky was glowing with the embers of the day.

Alaric was young for his age. His long isolation had kept him so, but his mind had of late sprung forward as if suddenly conscious of the intense movement which was in the world. His weakness had become his strength, and he was at twenty-two a cleaner, purer creature than most young men. As is the way in youth, he was egotistical about his emotions, and believed this new inrush of amazing feeling was a thing peculiar to himself. Youth, with all its capacity for feeling, sees little but the mask of those around it, and only when too late does it realize what other people are capable of.

He was passionately, madly in love with Jenny, but he could not have analysed her. It is not given to the young to do that. He knew that they two made entrancing music, and it was sufficient.

Of course no one had been in love as he was in love—this went without saying. The supreme felicity had been reserved for him. He no more than any lover was conscious of the absurdity of this attitude. He could not conceive that these subtle thrills, these wild upspringings of joy, were

human heritage as much as the glory of earth, sea and sky. Youth knoweth its own love, no other.

Of course there is genius in the world of love, just as in all other forms of energy. There are those who hold that Don Juan's nemesis is that he can never understand women. Those who believe this are fools, sacrificing truth for a high-sounding generality. But one can exhaust a taste for virtue, just as one can exhaust a taste for vice, and with exhaustion things are put at their true value.

Alaric had the makings of a passionate and intense lover. Most people talk contemptuously of the love of young things as if it were of no account, a thing to be ruthlessly set aside; but what would they not give to sense again those fierce vibrations which turn everything to cyphers of absolute joy? Never again is the soul quite so free to move in its own world of rapture.

He gave himself up to the luxury of thinking of Jenny as his wife. He seriously reflected on the possibility of there being any objection to himself. She was obviously wealthy, and she was beautiful and charming enough to marry anyone. The beloved is always, even when she is not like Jenny, a thing of beauty. By the time he had fully reflected on the matter he had come to look upon himself as almost ineligible. Eight thousand a year and a place it was difficult to keep up need not necessarily be great attractions to her, apart from the fact that she loved him. Did she love him? He had no right to think so, no absolute ground

to go on. Yet he did think so—never in his heart of hearts did he dream it could be otherwise.

He was too young, had had too little reason in his life to cultivate secrecy, not to be somewhat ingenuous in the matter with his aunt.

True, he began by talking as if it were the most ordinary of friendships, but he talked too frequently of Jenny and dwelt too much on her perfections for his aunt to be deceived.

Miss Burne somehow felt it would be a good thing for Alaric to marry early. She knew his temperament to be highly-strung and chivalrous, but he had grown full of energy of late and lacked the training of a public school. The discipline of married life would be a good thing, from her point of view, for her outlook on life was strictly limited to the family.

Besides, she believed in early marriages, and her instinct in this matter was probably right. Wholesale deviations from such a rule are exotic and unnatural. It may not be possible for many young men to marry in early manhood; it was obviously desirable that those should do so who were able.

The more she heard of Jenny the more favourably impressed she was, and the better the impression the greater comedian Jenny would appear to have been when Miss Burne heard the truth. Poor Jenny had not foreseen how far-reaching would be the malignancy of her deception.

"She's dignified, you know—that's what I like about her, aunt."

"And no woman can have a greater virtue," agreed Miss Burne warmly.

"I wish you knew them."

"Do you think they would like me to call, Alaric?"

"Yes. I'm sure they would."

This was young and tactless on his part.

"I am driving into Seaborough to-morrow afternoon."

"I will meet you at the library and take you on."

"You are quite sure that they won't consider it an intrusion? You would like me to know them?"

"Of course."

"No 'of course' about it."

Alaric half thought of telling his aunt of his love for Jenny, but decided to wait till they had met. Miss Burne, he was sure, could not be otherwise than favourably impressed by her. The male seldom reckons with the fact that it is just the things men admire in women which women, by the nature of things, do not. Men are good judges of effect; they are not connoisseurs in points.

"Have they ever spoken about anybody you know or know of, Alaric?"

"I don't think they have."

He forebore to mention that he had seen hardly anything of Mrs. Goodchild. Somehow he felt that her constant absence might not reflect very favourably upon Jenny in the eye of a stranger.

CHAPTER XVI

THE next morning Jenny walked into the post office at Seaborough before breakfast and telegraphed to the Duke :

“ If possible come at once.”

He would understand that it was urgent. She had never come across anything which he could not understand. She always felt quite safe with him.

In case it should seem a little selfish of Jenny to call a man of the Duke's age to her side at a moment's notice, it must be remembered that the Duke had never pleaded a single privilege of age and had laid his time fully at her feet. She would not deceive again. Never again in her life would she tell or act a lie. Her experience had been too deeply humiliating. Even if Alaric did not care for her she must tell the Duke. Her own experience of the crooked path had taught her :

What a tangled web we weave
When we practise to deceive,

and hers was not a nature which could possibly live in an atmosphere of deception.

Emma did not mention the matter at breakfast, neither did she allude to it again during the morning, but Jenny knew that she was relying on her strength of mind. Emma only asked :

“ Is Sir Alaric coming over to-day ? ”

“ Yes, I think so. By the way, I’ve telegraphed for Daddy.”

“ To the Duke ? ”

“ Yes, I want him.”

Emma quite understood. She saw that apart from the predicament in which Jenny found herself, she wanted the Duke to know everything as soon as possible. This seemed hopeful, and as if she intended to clear the matter up.

Jenny expected an answer to her telegram, but none came. Perhaps the Duke was away. It was not likely, however, that the telegram would be long in reaching him. Then for the first time it entered her mind that he might be ill. She had never thought of illness in connection with him, but now she realized what it would mean if he were really ill.

Someone had once said in her hearing that the Duke would probably live till he was ninety, and it had never till now come upon her that, after all, he was an old man, and that an illness might mean his breaking up.

Once, on a Sunday evening in the spring, they had paced the river walk at Glamoy’s Lodge, and he had told her his views on life, and death, and faith.

“ Sinners—and I suppose in the eyes of the rigid I should be considered one—are supposed to fear death, but I cannot think I shall be afraid. I

do not conceive God as an eternal setter of traps ; and I don't believe morality, real morality, is anything like the thing the puritans would have us think it. How can anything be right which produces ugliness ? I believe in the first place that though in a sense we are always in the presence of our Creator, yet in another sense we are millions of years from Him. As regards this life I should like to sink away, my dear, with your hand in mine and your laugh, that wonderful laugh, in my ears."

A less intuitive nature would have burst into a banal protest against this talking of death, but Jenny pressed his arm and drew closer.

She remembered this conversation with a feeling of terror that he might be ill, and that he might be with people who would not let her go to him. Her heart almost stopped at the thought of such a thing.

Alaric came in the early afternoon, and Jenny and he walked into the garden. Emma, who had heard his arrival and had seen them pass through the garden gate, was convinced that Jenny meant to tell Alaric the truth.

Her heart gave a thump as she thought of the ordeal through which her darling had to pass.

But the afternoon wore away and Jenny had not confessed. They had wandered aimlessly about the shore, happy enough to be with each other. More than once Jenny had had to avoid one of the traps which her own lie had laid for her at every turn—yet she did not confess. She brought Alaric in to tea and then she made her great effort.

Emma had kept out of sight. She knew that if Jenny were forgiven she would fly to her like a bird with the good news. If the matter ended badly she would hear of it quite as soon.

"You seem awfully quiet to-day," said Alaric, watching Jenny across the table.

"Do I?"

"Yes; is anything worrying you?"

"Yes, a little; no, not a little, a great deal."

"Perhaps I'm getting a nuisance; beginning to bore you."

"Oh, no; what makes you think that?"

"Well, you know, you seem to be accustomed to all sorts of clever people."

"I don't think I am."

"Oh, yes; one can tell that by the way you talk. I've never done anything, you know. I sometimes think that perhaps you despise me for being such an idler."

"I think you ought to do something."

"I know. I intend to. Of course there's my property to look after—that will take up a fair amount of time, but I should like to do something else too."

"What?"

"Oh, the army, or diplomacy, or something. You see, these things would all have been provided for in the case of any ordinary fellow. Still, I've no doubt I shall always find plenty to do in looking after my own affairs. Lots of fellows leave those things too much to agents, and I don't approve of that."

Jenny understood. The Duke had, during his many educational talks, taken her over the ground

of his duties, and she had smiled at the difference between what a man in his position has to get through and the idle life which most people think he leads.

"And then, Jenny," he would conclude, "there is philanthropy. I don't believe in philanthropic schemes much. They do as much harm as good, but they take up quite a lot of time, and one is put up as a figure-head—a somewhat absurd figure very often—for every kind of undertaking which mawkish sentiment, compounding with its own conscience, can devise."

Alaric spoke again of his boyhood and his long illnesses and his sudden and wonderful building up towards health.

"Everyone who knows me says it's the most extraordinary thing they have ever come across."

"But who was it put you right?"

"A bonesetter."

Jenny looked up with an almost comic alertness of inquiry. She wondered for the moment if Alaric were joking and were inventing a name.

"What is a bonesetter?"

"Well, this man was something more than a bonesetter. He discovered that I wasn't properly fitted together, so he pulled me out and pushed me in and screwed me down till I was quite in place."

"But why didn't the doctors do it?"

"Because they don't know as much about this sort of thing as they should, and they would like to prosecute the bonesetters. They say their cures are no cures. Doctors are frightfully narrow, you know. They've got a sort of star chamber called

the General Medical Council, where they condemn people to professional death without a free-born Englishman being able to appeal to the law of his own country."

"And did the bonesetter cure you?"

"Yes; and one of these days the doctors will steal all these fellows know and say they found it out."

"How do you come to know so much about all this?"

"The chap who cured me put me on to it, and I've read a lot. It's one of the few things I do know a little about. Do you know, when I'm a bit older and I've got my hands well on the rudder of my own ship, I'm going to see if I can't get the youngsters in my villages taught something about their own bodies. I shall pay a couple of lecturers to go round. If you come to think of it, the state of ignorance we live in is absurd."

He found himself talking quite earnestly, and paused, flushing with the self-consciousness of the young Englishman who has been betrayed into a serious speech of any length, but Jenny was interested. She had not heard him speak like this before and could not understand why.

"Go on."

But the flush remained in Alaric's cheeks and he was silent. He was thinking how wonderful it would be if it should be Jenny to stand by his side and help him in such a work.

Then before Jenny, who had now made up her mind that the time had come when she must tell him the truth, could speak, Alaric had lost his self-control and was pouring out his love in a torrent

of words, a mixture of idiomatic English and sentimental sublimation.

"I daresay you don't think I know my own mind, but I do. I couldn't ever love anyone else, I couldn't."

Jenny was silent. In her soul was an awful horror, for she realized that this was just what should not have happened before he had been told the truth. It was the supreme betrayal. The abyss yawned before her.

"I'm sorry," she gasped. Then she stopped. Alaric, white with excitement, was standing before her with clenched hands. He was quivering from head to foot with the desire to take her in his arms. At the words "I am sorry" he reeled a little. She couldn't mean that she didn't care for him. That was impossible. He would not believe it; not for one moment did he believe that she had been playing with him.

"Do you mean that you don't care for me?"

"No." The great eyes faced him steadily.

"Then you do love me?" His voice broke a little on the last two words, but the look in her face was sufficient answer. He took her in his arms and, trembling from head to foot, kissed her.

There was a long silence, and for a few minutes Jenny gave herself up to the ecstasy of it. For some time he could say nothing but "Jenny," at intervals of taking her hands and pressing them. He held her to him and kissed her, growing bolder, each kiss being a little surer and stronger than the first one he had laid upon her lips.

After a time he spoke of his aunt. The fact that Miss Burne was at that moment on her way

to see her hardly penetrated to her brain, for she was making a desperate effort to tell him the truth.

"There is something very important I want to tell you——" but he hardly heard her.

"I am to meet my aunt at the Library. May I bring her here? We won't tell her everything to-day. Don't let us tell anybody for just a day or two."

In a little while he was gone, with the permission to bring his aunt, and Jenny was alone with thoughts of a headlong flight to London, and even dark thoughts of the deep, deep sea. If only she could die. If only the earth would hide her! In the stress of his excitement Alaric had heard nothing of her attempted explanation.

Then, at the very height of her despair, there came the sound of carriage-wheels outside and a voice in the hall asking for her, and her friend was with her. The sudden sense of safety was tremendous, and she flew to him with an abandonment he had never seen her display; all the outworks of dignity were thrown down. She was treacherous, disgraceful, and horrible, but he would understand. He would give her back some piece of self-respect from the wreck. Then again there was the joy of knowing that he was well, still the alive, perennial creature whom she knew.

"Why didn't you come and meet me? Didn't you get my telegram?"

"No!"

"I sent it from the club."

"I thought you were not in town after all or——" Jenny hesitated a little—"that you were ill."

The break in her voice touched the Duke.

"Where's Mrs. Goodchild?"

"I don't know."

There was no time to lose.

"Daddy, don't let them take your things off the cab."

"Why?"

"I will tell you why after."

The Duke, wondering a little, gave the order, and then closed the door.

"What's the matter? Something has happened."

"Yes, I must tell you quite quickly."

He knew her too well to do other than wait. He noticed that she kept away from him as she spoke.

"The other day, Daddy, that is, about ten days ago, I was nearly drowned, and I was saved by Sir Alaric Burne."

"Sir Alaric Burne!" The Duke, who had sat up as she told him of her narrow escape, repeated the name thoughtfully.

"There was a Lady Burne who bolted—I remember."

"It was his mother."

"Then he's a youngster."

The Duke looked at her keenly, and Jenny came at once to the point.

"The first day he was here he asked whose photograph that was, and——"

She paused. Told like this, it sounded without excuse. There was no time, however, to help herself as she went along. She must for the moment be content to tell the bare facts. There was the danger of Miss Burne and Alaric coming upon them, and the mere thought of such a situation

made her heart leap into her throat. She interrupted her story abruptly.

"I want you to take me back to London at once."

"At once?"

"Yes. Let us drive to the Junction and catch the express."

"But there must be a very good reason for this?"

"There is."

"What is it?"

"I will tell you as we go along."

Then she remembered his age, the sudden journey he had taken in reply to her telegram. She saw the fatigue with which, in spite of the excitement caused by her inexplicable utterances, he sank into an arm-chair. She was filled with remorse and tenderness.

"Oh, Daddy, forgive me. I will never be selfish again; but do let me tell you all about it in the train."

The Duke looked at her with a sudden sharpness of glance—a slight stiffening of his poise. "We are not running away, are we?"

Jenny, brought face to face with the truth, was silent. Her eyes fell, but she nodded.

"From what?"

She looked helpless. The minutes were flying.

"Won't you let me tell you as we go along?" she pleaded.

A smile which was not all a smile flickered about the lips of the Duke. There was a firmness behind it which told Jenny she would have to give reasons for flight.

"From what?" he repeated.

Jenny tried for the last time to make flight immediate and sure.

“ Won’t you let me tell you as we go along ? ”

The eyes were humid, and the appeal in Jenny’s face full of a caressing charm. She rarely condescended to tricks, and they were consequently almost irresistible, but an intuition, perhaps the essence of enormous experience, bade the Duke be careful.

“ No, I’m afraid that won’t altogether do,” he said, checking a movement towards the door. “ I don’t care about running away until I know what I’m running away from.”

Jenny protested with both hands, but the Duke continued :

“ You see, it might be better not to run away at all. Come, tell me quickly.”

Jenny was singularly clear-headed, even at this moment. It was her character always to recognize the inevitable and make friends with it. Still, she hesitated. To tell the truth, and such a life-influencing, complex truth affecting the Duke, as well as herself and Alaric, was not altogether fair to the subject itself. The Duke grew a little impatient. He justly felt that lack of trust was the one thing he did not deserve from Jenny.

“ Good lord, little girl, can’t you trust me ? ”

There was something in the tone of the voice and in the remark which brought her to her senses. The idea of the Duke thinking she did not trust him was intolerable.

She commenced quickly.

“ Sir Alaric Burne saved my life, and he’s been here several times.”

The expression on the Duke's face changed. There was no mistaking the meaning of Jenny's simple statement. Their eyes met, and Jenny's did a thing they were not apt to do. She was not the girl to make ignoble appeals. Nevertheless, there were tears in her eyes as she looked, straight as was her wont, into the Duke's.

"Daddy——" she said abruptly, and stopped.

There was what seemed a long silence. A slight expression of pain stole over the Duke's face. Presently he said gently :

"I see, the fellow's fallen in love with you."

Jenny answered "Yes" quite simply, without even a shadow of the conscious smile that such avowals are usually accompanied by.

"And you?"

Then indeed Jenny turned her face away, partly because she had an idea of what this confession meant to the splendid old man before her. The Duke came over and, taking her face into both hands, looked at her earnestly.

"I see—I understand."

Even at that moment of hurry the sense of loss was keen. It was hardly perceptible, however, as he continued in an almost cheerful voice : "Well, it was bound to happen at some time or other, wasn't it?"

For a moment Jenny wondered if he were picturing Alaric as a young man of birth and wealth who thought her good enough to fall in love with, but not good enough to marry. She continued quickly :

"He has asked me to be his wife."

The Duke had hardly thought it could be otherwise. His experience of Jenny prevented the idea

that she was likely to play a part in a love-story which was derogatory to her dignity.

"Good, and of course there are difficulties. Relations who don't see things in the same light. Well, we must see what can be done." The Duke began to look round the matter as well as he could with the material at his command. Then he realized that Jenny's impatience was growing momentarily, and that time had been proclaimed the essence of the situation.

"But why are we running away?"

"Because—because—he doesn't know who I am—he thinks——" She stopped, feeling unutterably helpless. Still the moments were flying, and an explanation which would carry them out of the house and on the way to London was imperative. If she could only get the essential point out, the rest would be easier.

"You mean that, like silly children, you've been quarrelling?"

"No, we haven't quarrelled. It's worse than that. You must be told the whole truth, only it's so difficult."

"Growing afraid of me?"

"He doesn't know who I am. Oh, it's so difficult. I feel so mean. You'll despise me, Daddy."

The Duke began to think the matter must be serious, and he said gravely:

"I'm a pretty old stager, Jenny. I think I can understand most things. Come, put your hand in mine."

Jenny drew away from him, with her back to the light.

"No, I'll tell you standing here, and afterwards

you can tell me to go back to my gutter, and I shall understand."

For a moment the Duke thought the offer of marriage was compensation tendered for an injury. At the thought a surprising change came over him. The great, keen blue eyes flashed, the delicate, almost womanish skin grew purple and then white, the thin nostrils dilated furiously.

"If he's behaved like a blackguard, I'll——"

The phrase, coming from the lips of the Duke of Glamoy, might have impressed a cynic of his own period with amusement; but men are curious things, and other men must respect their property, whatever acts of piracy may have distinguished the profligates' career.

"No, no, you mustn't say anything against him." She went on quickly. "The first day he came, directly after he had saved my life, he asked whose photograph that was, and all of a sudden I felt the difficulty of explaining—I had never felt shy about it before—I realized what people say for the first time. And before I knew what I was doing"—here Jenny, true to her character, faced the Duke as she confessed her treason—"I said that you were my father."

The Duke's lips moved as if he had inadvertently tasted something exceedingly bitter, whilst his eyebrows went up in amazement.

"Your father?" he repeated.

"Yes," said Jenny, in a little crushed voice which she hardly recognized as her own.

The Duke allowed the exceeding bitter taste to pass a little before he replied. "Thankye," he said at last dryly, "thankye."

The answer was crushing in its irony and breeding.

"Was that quite fair to me?" he added.

"I know. I've thought it all out since. I beg your pardon."

For a moment the Duke sank below his level, and asked:

"What did you do it for?"

To a man of his experience the reason must have been only too obvious. Jenny was disappointed. She was accustomed to his seeing all round a subject at once. She felt as if a support on which she had counted had been knocked away.

"Because I think I knew at once——" With an effort she tried to choke back her tears, but she was wretched and frightened, and her sentence finished in a great sob.

Her tears were ten times the more effective in that she had never used them unfairly. The slight sternness which her confession had produced in the Duke's attitude melted. "Never mind about me, Jenny; I begin to understand." She turned and laid her hand in his. He at once commenced to make things easy for her.

"I think I can follow it all. You felt at once that you loved him, and as we all do when we are in love, we make absurd mistakes—such absurd mistakes."

Before such kindness and generosity the flood-gates of Jenny's contrition were opened. Very tenderly Glamoy took both her hands in his, and drew her head on to his shoulder.

"Don't cry, my dear; I can't bear to see you cry," he said gently.

"Oh, Daddy, what a dear you are, and what a beast I am!"

"Well, I won't say that; but I can't say you've much to be proud of. But why are we running away?"

"This afternoon Sir Alaric asked me to marry him, and I tried to tell him the truth, and somehow I couldn't—and I said 'Yes' without telling him, and then he told me his aunt was coming to call this afternoon, and," said Jenny, looking at the Duke with a fear in her eyes which was almost comic, despite the situation, "she's coming here. She may be here at any moment."

Glamoys saw it all now.

"I see, and then the truth would have to be told, of course."

He smiled, and added with a touch of his usual humour: "I begin to see why we are running away. I begin to feel like it myself. But don't you think it will be better to face it?"

Even as he made the suggestion he gave a wry smile as he saw himself trying to impress the incredulity of Alaric's aunt—and the passionate resentment of Alaric. Jenny did not protest; she only answered sadly:

"I couldn't. I wish I could. I will write and tell him everything—and then——"

"Does Mrs. Goodchild know——?"

"Yes, but I only told her yesterday."

"But——"

"I know what you are going to say, but you are wrong. She's been about the whole time. You know how she manages to look after one without being actually there. There isn't anyone to blame but me."

"I didn't mean that," said the Duke hastily ;
"I have absolute faith in Emma Goodchild."

He thought deeply for a moment. As he had suggested, his first instinct was to stay and clear the matter up for better or worse, but Jenny's untruth had created an ugly situation, which grew more ugly the more he thought of it. It made every explanation suspect ; indeed, the more things were explained the blacker they would look.

"Couldn't you say it was a joke ? "

"Daddy ! "

"No, of course not. That would make it look worse than ever." He reflected again deeply. After a minute or so, during which Jenny watched him with a strange fluttering in her throat, he turned to her and said decisively :

"Get your things on and we'll start at once."

"You are very good to me." She made an impulsive movement as if she would have kissed his hand.

"Tush, go along ; we've no time to lose."

Emma, unnoticed, had crossed the lawn from the shore gate and was in the room before Jenny could leave it.

She had been wandering among the rocks, and had a mass of purple seaweed in her hands. She had come to hear Jenny's news, and there was a bright light in her eyes. Was it evil or well with her ? The joy of having had her son so near her, daily within view, often in her presence, had, in conjunction with sea air and midsummer weather, almost driven away the look of care and unhappiness which had hung over her. The Duke came forward and shook her warmly by the hand.

"How well you look, Mrs. Goodchild! We are just going."

He was almost as impatient to be off as Jenny had been, and so came at once to the point.

"Going!"

"Jenny tells me that you know everything."

Jenny interposed hastily:

"Emma does not know that Sir Alaric's aunt may be here at any moment. She is coming to call on me," she explained to Emma.

Neither of them noticed the sudden pallor in Emma's face, or if they did, they put it down to her perturbation at this new development in Jenny's affairs.

"You are advising Jenny to run away?"

"Well, I think it is better to get a little time to think things over, don't you?"

"It will look very bad," she answered. Her first inclination was to get them away as soon as possible. It would be out of the question for her to allow Miss Burne to recognize her without some preliminary explanation. Her intention had always been to disappear quietly when the crisis arrived, and possibly to take the Duke into her confidence in order to make the thing easier.

As things were developing, she foresaw that she would be left to explain to Miss Burne. Even that was better than having a terrible scene into which her own exposure might impart bitterness, if not a sense of horror, as far as her son was concerned.

"Jenny has told me her point of view, and I think she ought to be allowed to act on it."

He felt the excuse to be a little weak, and frankly admitted the second part of the difficulty.

"There's another point, you see. I don't quite know what sort of figure I should cut before the boy's aunt. It might be comic. On second thoughts, I am quite convinced that I should look ridiculous. I think we had better go. You need not see Miss Burne." He realized the possibility of Emma thinking it somewhat selfish that she should be left to face the situation unaided. "You are not necessarily involved. You can let the maid say that Miss Oldcastle has had bad news and has returned to London."

Jenny laid her hands imploringly on Emma.

"I must go, Emma, I must."

Without waiting to hear the matter argued further, she left the room.

"I hope you don't think I'm a coward in this matter, Mrs. Goodchild."

The Duke so obviously felt uncomfortable and at a loss that, remembering all his consideration and kindness, Emma sank her own feelings and tried to make the flight as dignified for him as possible.

"You know this young man, this Alaric Burne?"

"Yes."

"Do you like him?"

"Very much."

"Do you think he will make her happy?"

"If it comes to that, I think they were made for each other. I can see that it was just one of those things which might happen quite naturally."

"You mean what she said about my being her father?"

"Yes."

"Things will be difficult—very difficult." He looked at her as if for endorsement of this view.

"About as difficult as they could be."

"It must be arranged somehow. It must be. We can't have Jenny's happiness interfered with. Do you know anything of the aunt?"

"She lives not far from here."

"I knew his father. Killed himself with drink. His wife ran away."

"I have not seen his aunt." There was not time, or she would have been almost inclined to take the Duke into her confidence and tell him everything. Next to Father Hawthorne he was the one person she could have trusted in the matter.

"I am afraid Jenny has unwittingly given us all away."

"Yes; and yet she is hardly to blame."

"I am to blame. I should have benefited her less ostentatiously. There," he concluded, as he heard Jenny approaching, "it's no use arguing about the past. That has never been my way. We must do the best we can for the future. The world was made for futurists."

The carriage drove away, not to the town station, but to the Junction, four miles off, where they could board the express.

Emma was left in the house alone. Her heart beat rapidly as she realized that her sister-in-law and her son would soon be at the door.

Should she see them? Not together, that was impossible. She had no desire that her son should meet her at such a moment of stress. It would

complicate his young life too much. Too much bitter truth taken at once shatters the ideals of the young. It does more, for ideals are like the rag dolls of childhood ; they are beloved to the end when almost all semblance of shape and meaning has been battered out of them ; they stand for more than wax. True souls with faith in salvation carry their ideals to the grave reverently, in the hope of laying their dolls before the eternal throne, and seeing them blossom in a new and more beautiful youth.

But more sorrow than is good to know may check growth instead of encouraging it, and this truth the mother soul in Emma grasped.

She must see Miss Burne alone ; at least, till she had her assurance of silence.

She remembered Miss Burne as a spinster of thirty-four, of decided views, sure of the divine origin of conventions, sure that disagreement with them was divided between precocity and affectation, both extreme forms of wickedness. From the little that Alaric had let fall it would appear that she had mellowed. Perhaps the care of a child for nearly twenty years had softened her.

They had disagreed always ; but Emma was no longer the inexperienced young wife whom Miss Burne had found it so easy to put in the wrong.

There was a ring at the bell, and the maid came to say that Miss Burne was in the drawing-room.

“ Is Sir Alaric with her ? ”

“ No, ma'am.”

Emma was puzzled. What had happened ? However, it was fortunate.

"If Sir Alaric should call, show him in here."

She went to the drawing-room, but even with her hand on the door she half drew back, wondering whether it might not be better to leave Miss Burne in ignorance of her identity. Then the need of explaining Jenny, her position and her conduct, and of asseverating her innocence impressed itself imperatively.

She must let her sister-in-law have the whole story from beginning to end. She was quite aware that, apart from the question of deception, Alaric's aunt would deem an actress of any kind—much more a burlesque actress—quite unsuited to become Alaric's wife. She might conceivably welcome the duplicity which Jenny's conduct had displayed as triumphant evidence of bad character. Poor Jenny had indeed put herself in a false light and done herself every possible injustice.

Pulling herself together, Emma walked into the room, and stood before her sister-in-law awaiting recognition.

Miss Burne advanced with a pleasant smile. She had no doubt of why she had been asked to call, and she was prepared to treat Mrs. Goodchild as colleague, both of them working for the good of the young people. This was, of course, providing everything was satisfactory.

She was by nature a woman of strong and direct impulse, but she had so often done harm by her early lack of reflection that experience had taught her wariness and circumspection. The matter was too serious to be handled hastily. She had more than once thought out her line of conduct when Alaric should make

some such announcement, and had always been determined not to make the mistake, if she could help it, of driving him on by opposition.

The description he had drawn of the distinguished old father, the quiet and restrained duenna, and the well-dressed girl had impressed her favourably.

"You know, aunt, her clothes are just ripping, but somehow they are as quiet as they can be. You can't help looking at her hair, it's so well done, and yet it isn't a bit showy." This all sounded like the presence of wealth and good breeding, and if this were the case there was no great harm done.

Still, the judgment of young men when they are in love is apt to be faulty, and she recognized the fact that for a young man of his position Alaric knew singularly little of the world.

Before Emma's entrance she had been examining Jenny's photograph, and had been favourably impressed. It was a likeness in which there was no possibility of detecting the burlesque actress.

Yes, Alaric was right as regards her beauty. She was decidedly startling, and with a certain freedom and independence of personality which was puzzling.

The fatal portrait of the Duke was standing near, and Miss Burnè had just time to glance at it before Emma entered. It bewildered her, she could not say why; indeed, she was not altogether conscious of being bewildered, only of a sub-conscious wonder.

She had put out her hand and had begun to

speak before this ghost from the past struck her dumb.

She thought she must be dreaming, that it was an uncanny and distorted likeness of the woman she had known. The thing was incredible. Emma Burne was dead—had been dead for years.

“ You are right, Isabel ; I am Emma.”

“ Emma ! ”

Miss Burne spoke the word in a voice of low wonder. Emma did not at first reply. The last time these two women parted it had been in anger. It was not a little owing to her sister-in-law that Emma had walked out of her husband's house and irretrievably wrecked her life.

Not that Miss Burne was a hard woman or a woman prone to evil intentions, but she was a woman quite definite, not only as to what she thought she ought to do, but as to what she thought other people ought to do.

For all her strength of mind, she was for once rendered helpless by bewilderment. She could only look at Emma with eyes wide and questioning.

“ I did not want to meet you, Isabel. I did not intend to meet you ; but as we have met, I had better explain everything.”

“ If you please,” said Miss Burne slowly. “ Alaric will be here in half an hour. He wanted me to see you first.”

“ Miss Oldcastle has gone to London.”

For the first time Miss Burne saw trouble in the direction in which she had been interested, and she stiffened dangerously. She was in an atmosphere of sinister surprises.

"There has been a very wrong state of things existing without my being aware of it," began Emma.

Miss Burne's mind was becoming more and more confused. Interested as she was in Alaric and Jenny, she could not help wondering what the life of this woman had been since they parted. The change was so dramatic. She had seen her last a beauty, in the most exclusive social set. How had she lived since that time, and what had that life been to mark her face with such deep evidences of suffering?

Alaric would be there soon, however, and she pulled herself together in order to have a full knowledge of the situation.

Emma went on.

"Alaric knows very little of the world, Isabel."

"Very little, I am glad to say."

Emma wondered why anybody should be glad to say that, but she continued:

"He might otherwise have heard of Miss Oldcastle before he met her."

Miss Burne looked at her sharply.

"Who is Miss Oldcastle?"

"You may have heard her name." An idea struck her. As the shortest way, she took up a paper with a paragraph about Jenny in it, and handed it to her sister-in-law. Miss Burne read it slowly, and with a growing tension of feature. At last she put it down.

"Do you mean to say that this is true?"

"Yes, it is best to tell you the unpleasant side first."

Miss Burne ignored the suggestion that there

might be a pleasant side to such a revelation and asked :

“ But her father ? ”

Then came the hardest part of Emma's task. She was obliged to tell of Jenny's deception.

“ It was not her father. It was the Duke of Glamoyes.”

Then Miss Burne remembered something of the story—vaguely at first, and gradually clear-cut, she remembered fragments of after-dinner chatter by some ladies of high rank over a photograph of Jenny.

“ I don't know whether it's true. It's quite extraordinary, the infatuation of a man like that for a child,” the Marchioness of Colthurst had said.

“ My husband tells me it's quite paternal,” Lady Brinkwater had replied.

There had been a discreet silence. It was not exactly what people wanted to believe. The same photograph was now on the table by Miss Burne's side.

“ You are the companion of this Miss Oldcastle—and she is Jenny Oldcastle the actress ? ”

“ Yes.”

Miss Burne sat looking at Emma in silence, what she had been told piecing itself together as parts of a general conspiracy which only her unexpected appearance on the scene had thwarted. She at once came to an obvious conclusion—that Emma's present position was the result of a life of sin, that when she had gone out of their lives it had been into the vortex of indulgence and depravity. But our lives, broadly speaking, are written in

our faces, and what Isabel was trying to read into Emma's face was not there.

"Do I understand that you have countenanced the deception of your own son in this matter?"

The possibility of this particular accusation had not occurred to Emma, but it struck her like a blow. "How dare you?"

Miss Burne was a little surprised at the vehemence of the reply. The implication had seemed to her inevitable. "Then what am I to understand?"

"Will you tell me first what you really think is the case?"

"I think you wanted your son, and you used this girl as a decoy."

Emma gazed at Miss Burne steadily, but made no reply. It was an accusation which outraged her too much for refutation.

"The Duke of Glamoy, with the best intentions, put Miss Oldcastle in an invidious position. He looks upon her as an adopted child. He did not foresee that the world would not accept that point of view."

"He has had sufficient experience to have avoided such a mistake."

"The girl is partly to blame. She naturally seeks the best. She was brought up in the gutter. She refused to see the danger."

"You must have seen it."

"I warned her."

Emma felt the explanation to be futile. It wanted something; it wanted an intimate knowledge of Jenny.

"She fell in love," she went on hurriedly,

"and then for the first time realized the mistake she had made."

The story was too bare in the facts.

"You are to understand, Isabel, that Jenny Oldcastle is not at all the sort of person you think her. If I did not believe absolutely in her goodness I should not be here."

This way of speaking of a burlesque actress seemed to Miss Burne strained. It was not her fault that she did not know better. Women of her class forget that they only hear of the private life of those who make themselves notorious.

Emma had an advantage in dealing with her sister-in-law of which she herself was not altogether conscious. Isabel Burne remembered her as a singularly truthful woman. She remembered, also, the character of the brother who had been Emma's husband. She had always had the uncomfortable knowledge that however much the woman before her might have sinned, she had been bitterly wronged.

She considered, however, that her statement as regards Jenny would require strong confirmation. She began to suspect treachery everywhere. She knew the strength of her sister-in-law's character, and realized that if she had made up her mind to carry the matter through she would do so. She remembered the way in which she had taken her revenge. There had been no hesitation, only a just resentment.

"If Miss Oldcastle is all you say, is it not very extraordinary that she should have practised this deception?"

“It is all very difficult to explain.”

Miss Burne was about to remark that she should imagine so, but checked herself. She was impressed by her sister-in-law, in spite of herself. “I am listening.”

Poor Emma hardly knew how to begin. It was necessary to create the atmosphere of Jenny for Miss Burne.

“There is not time to put the whole matter fairly before you as it should be put. I can only make a statement, which you can believe or not, as you please.”

“Why has she left for London?”

“She has run away.”

“And left you to face the matter?”

“No. She feels that there can be no explanation; that she can never expect to be believed. It is entirely of my own free will that I am seeing you. Till you were here, in the house, I had not made up my mind to see you. It is better so, however.”

“She was going to leave Alaric without an explanation?”

“She is going to write, telling him everything, and leave him to judge for himself.”

“Do you suggest that this is in any way a suitable match for him?”

Emma was silent. She hardly knew what to say. Something of the caste spirit in which she had been bred influenced her attitude, notwithstanding all that Jenny was to her, notwithstanding that in a sense she could not imagine anyone more suited to Alaric. There were, of course, the many difficulties which it was im-

possible to ignore. People bred in purple and fine linen never become absolute democrats.

"I cannot answer that with a mere yes or no. You must get it clearly into your mind that Jenny is not the woman you have thought her to be. That is the first thing."

"And Alaric. Have you forgotten him?"

Miss Burne was one of those women to whom the feelings of outsiders must always be very far subsidiary to the interests of any member of the family. Most women have the family feeling more intensely developed than men. This is natural. With Miss Burne the feeling was a passion.

She would have been quite unable to understand her sister-in-law's devotion to an outsider. It must, to her mind, necessarily run counter to her affection for her son.

"Do you think people are ever likely to accept Miss Oldcastle, even if what you say is true?"

Emma answered unhesitatingly. "With such a nature as Jenny's all things are possible. Her character tends naturally towards what is good, and her social ability amounts to genius. Oh, I admit the whole situation is extraordinary, almost beyond credibility, but I am glad of one thing, you know absolutely the whole truth. That is why I made up my mind to see you. There is nothing hidden—and what you know is the absolute truth."

Almost a smile came over Miss Burne's face. From her point of view the truth could not have been worse than it was.

They sat in silence in the rapidly darkening

room, waiting for Alaric. Miss Burne felt worn and exhausted. Her life since she had had charge of her nephew had been a very quiet one, singularly free from even those excitements which occur in the most humdrum lives. Her house, during Alaric's precarious childhood, had been almost cloistral in its quiet and solitude, and this shock was to her shattering.

A breeze had risen and the tide was high. The waves were falling on the shore with a growing crescendo.

"I don't wish Alaric to be told of me, Isabel."

Miss Burne sighed with relief. She had feared that Emma would step into his life.

Her memory went back over the years. She did not deny that the woman in front of her had been badly used. She had judged her harshly, but at that time most of her judgments were matters of prejudice. She had not considered how pitiable had been the fact of the young wife in the hands of her brother, a man with a quite insane love of pleasure, who had surrounded her with every imaginable temptation, and who had laughed at and boasted of her capacity for strong drink until it was too late.

Like his class, he had mistaken mad jealousy for outraged honour, and had driven from his door the girl whose mind he had debauched and whose habits he had ruined.

Miss Burne's conscience had not been easy on the matter. During the years which had passed since then she had confessed to herself that the outcast wife had been allowed to drift because she had been condemned as an utterly worthless thing.

These things passed swiftly through her mind as they sat waiting for Alaric.

Then the front-door bell rang and the hearts of the two women who sat in the shadows beat more rapidly. The door opened, and he came in joyously, came in upon them sitting with their misery, and knew at once that something dreadful had happened.

Miss Burne rose and went towards him.

"What's the matter?" he said, looking from one to the other.

"Jenny has gone to London, Sir Alaric."

"Gone to London?" The look of apprehension on his face deepened.

"Let us go home," said Miss Burne a little tremulously.

"What has happened?" asked Alaric again without moving.

"Miss Oldcastle is writing you from London," said Emma, moved by a desire to help Miss Burne in her obvious distress.

"You have seen her?" asked Alaric, turning to his aunt.

"I was too late, Alaric."

The atmosphere was so electric, the voices of the two women so strained, that Alaric would have been dense indeed had he not realized that something unforeseen and tragic had occurred.

"I think what there is to know you had better learn from your aunt," said Emma.

She would have given worlds to have had him to herself, to plead Jenny's cause with all the power at her command. It would have been, apart from the service to Jenny, an entering into

her son's life which must have been a strange, sweet happiness.

She remained silent, however, even a little cold, it seemed to Alaric. Miss Burne guessed the tumult that was raging in the poor mother's breast, and was anxious to be gone.

"You are quite sure Jenny will write to me?" he asked falteringly. He was but a boy, and the acute disappointment had brought a lump into his throat. He was too little versed in the ways of the world to have reckoned with serious obstacles. He had accepted his love-affair and its fullness of joy in a spirit of boyish optimism, sure that it would come to an ecstatic fruition.

Now he felt chilled, for the pleasure he had planned had eluded him. He felt like a child whose holiday has been spoiled by the drenching rain. However, it was impossible to remain in the house in the presence of Emma's impassiveness. It would have seemed like forcing his presence upon her.

He took his seat beside his aunt in her stately chariot, for if Miss Burne was content to be unostentatious in a general way, there was certain furnishing which she considered indispensable to her position. As they wheeled out into the high road Alaric turned a gloomy face to her.

"She told me she cared about me, Aunt Isabel. I suppose it was some serious news which took her back to town. It will be all right to-morrow. She will write to me directly she arrives."

Miss Burne said nothing. The carriage was not the best place in which to explain matters.

Her silence still further depressed him.

Miss Burne was acutely wretched at what she had to tell Alaric. Further, she was not sure that it would be effective in putting an end to the whole affair. Jenny's flight might merely be a clever ruse to draw him after her. Possibly the Duke had arrived unexpectedly, and immediate abandonment of the present battle-field was the only way of carrying on the campaign. The more she thought over the story Emma had told her, the less she was inclined to believe it. The Duke was known to be a glittering debauchee. The world had always excused him, because he did the work of his position; she did not excuse him—he and his kind were anathema to her. They had ruined her brother. This is the kind of pleasant fiction indulged in by women like Miss Burne to account for the evil doings of their male belongings. There is always an active conspiracy; they never attribute the catastrophe to its real causes.

When they reached the house she drew Alaric into the library, the room which they chiefly used, and where the lamps were already lighted.

"Alaric," she said gently, "you have been deceived. Miss Oldcastle is an actress from the Oddities Theatre in London. She is very notorious."

It was in her nature to tell him the whole truth, and it was certainly better than beating about the bush. He looked at his aunt and laughed, a queer little laugh, intended to show that her statement was ridiculous and that he did not believe it.

"Did Mrs. Goodchild tell you that?"

"Yes."

It was a thing which seemed strange and remote. Jenny an actress! Yet even as he laughed he

felt it to be true. It explained many things by which he had been unconsciously puzzled. Her air of authority, as of one who was accustomed to be considered, was consistent with the theatre star. She was not what his idea of an actress had been—he had conceived an actress to be all powder and tawdry clothing, a social gipsy at a glance. He had certainly never imagined that she could be fastidious, distinguished, with a low, light contralto voice which was more beautiful than the speaking voice of any well-bred woman he had ever met.

“ You think I would not marry an actress ? ”

“ She deceived you, Alaric.”

“ She will explain that. Perhaps she could not help herself. Her father——”

“ She has no father, Alaric.”

“ No father ? She showed me his photograph.”

“ That was not her father—it was the Duke of Glamoyes.”

Alaric looked at his aunt blankly. His face became a mask—expressionless. The remark “ It was the Duke of Glamoyes ” stunned him. A great woe like a wave rolled towards him. He tried to push it back, and as it towered threatening above him he put out both hands. The next moment it had fallen, and he was struggling for breath and foothold in the deep waters which turbulently boiled about him.

He seemed to have had a sort of nightmare, and after a few seconds’ giddiness he found himself staring at his aunt out of the middle of a great horror which enveloped him like a mist.

“ Aunt ! ”

There was a note in his voice such as she had heard from him during his childhood when some bewildering pain had him in its grip. Poor Miss Burne broke down. Her whole self was wrapped up in Alaric, and as she saw the growing agony in his face she felt his grief as if it had been her own, and anger with the cause flamed up within her.

Alaric was quite experienced enough to know what was implied in his aunt's tone as she spoke the Duke of Glamoy's name.

"It can't be," he said huskily. "It can't be."

His aunt was silent. She was wondering whether she should say—indeed, whether it was part of her business to explain—what Emma had told her, that the relations between Jenny and the Duke were purely platonic. She saw, however, that it would be dishonest not to give the girl such chance as she had.

"For myself, Alaric, I express no opinion, but Mrs. Goodchild says that there is nothing but friendship——"

Suddenly Alaric rose and went from the room. His aunt's tone did not suggest that she believed Emma, and his sudden and full realization that he had been duped made him see everything at its worst.

For the next two hours he paced his room in a tempest of grief and rage, alternately cursing Jenny and the Duke.

He could not find any excuse for Jenny, or any belief in her. She was viewed in the light of everything he remembered of the past. She had been laughing at him, and, strange to say, youth,

which has less cause to be sensitive on this point, is always more so than age.

He did not attach much importance to what Mrs. Goodchild had said about platonic friendship. If this were the case, why had she deceived him with what seemed—now he could look back on the incident—the swiftness and deftness of practised duplicity. It was horrible, and he shook his fist with rage.

Yet, unconsciously, he was trying to find some way of getting back to an indulgent attitude. Gradually the Duke emerged from the chaos, monstrous, hideous, as men past middle age who are not hypocrites or impotents appear to inexperienced youth—youth always sure of its sovereign right to pleasures.

Jenny as a victim—that was the only solution, indeed the natural solution for a lover. Somehow Jenny's personality did not quite respond to the suggestion. She evaded her place in the pictures which his imagination drew of the process by which the Duke had secured her. His wealth had done it, of course. This would not do; a hundred little touches of character made the machinery of this method creak. The glamour of the Duke's position combined with his wealth; but there again the argument was at fault. Jenny obviously loved culture and disliked vulgarity, but mere position would not have tempted her. She was a curiously inexplicable person from the standpoint which had just been revealed. There was nothing for it but to fall back on the Duke as an arch villain—a man it would be a service to kill.

Alaric was capable of suffering tortures of

jealousy—that jealousy of a thing we love which we are taught to consider virtue.

Twice he attempted to dress and join his aunt at dinner, but finally the tumult of his misery overcame him, and he silently descended the stairs and stole out of a side door, driven by the imperative necessity of being alone.

Miss Burne ate a solitary dinner. She was too tactful to send up to him. He was better fighting his battle alone. Later, she stole up from the smaller drawing-room where she usually sat after dinner, and knocked at his door. There was no answer, and she opened it. His room was empty, and she guessed what had happened. She suffered acutely, as we all do when we realize how little of the lives of those we love we can enter into, how truly far away we are from each other.

In Alaric's state of mind the hours pass quickly. The storm of suffering destroys all sensation of time. He tramped the country round through the early hours of the night ; it was the only way of easing the agony within him. He had known much physical suffering, although, with the elasticity of youth, he had put the memory of it behind him ; yet somehow this seemed worse, perhaps because the pain we have is always worse than the pain we might have had.

When in the early dawn he found himself before the house again, it seemed to rise spectrely out of his night of suffering as almost a strange place. He could not have said where he had been, well as he knew the neighbourhood.

He had a confused recollection of wandering

through woods and fields where the dew sopped beneath his feet, of a steady, dogged tramp along high roads which seemed vaguely familiar. For the greater part of the time he appeared to be existing in the delirium of a fever when everything is seen through a veil, or as if experienced under a narcotic.

He sank on to a garden seat by a small artificial fountain whose waters splashed with a cheerful pertinacity into the basin beneath. His eyes were tired, and he wondered how the morning could rise in such beauty when he was so wretched. A mermaid in stone pursued a young fisherman round the basin, and Alaric remembered Jenny's dark hair like a patch of fine seaweed floating just below the emerald surface of the water. He remembered the ecstasy of that sudden sensation of her in his arms, and how the blood had surged in his brain as his hand had clasped the warm, sweet breast.

"Oh, Jenny!" he moaned, and buried his face in his hands. Then he added with sudden change to fierce anger, "Damn her! Damn her to hell!"

He had spoken her name in every variety of tone during the night. He had even at times spoken it gently and caressingly with an appeal in his voice, as if praying her to show him that it was all a bad dream. His feet ached in his boots, sodden with dew. He had a great longing for air about his limbs. He rose and went down the path which led to a stream running through the park, out of sight of the house.

As he took his clothes off something of his misery seemed to fall from him. The pool in

which he bathed was deliciously cool, and he swam from shore to shore, almost forgetting the bitterness that was upon him.

He sat on the wet green sward with the sun filtering down through the trees from the east, and felt comforted by the new day, as is the wont of distracted human beings. By and by the growing heat warmed him through, and, overcome with fatigue, he slept.

It was nearly nine o'clock before he re-entered the house. On the way to his bedroom he saw a letter addressed to him lying on the hall table. It was in an unknown handwriting, but he knew from whom it was at once. Curiously enough, he had never seen Jenny's handwriting. He took it with a beating heart and hurried to his room.

There, with locked doors, he read it again and again. She must have written it directly she reached town. It was just a short description of herself, her career, and how everything came to be as it was. Her pride spoke throughout, and while admitting to the full her fault, she was not on her knees. She felt the subject a difficult one for her to discuss, and this was obvious in every line of her letter. There are always in human relations concealed factors which one side avoids, and it was the experience of life implied in Jenny's conduct which the feminality of Jenny declined to place on the table. Her intuitions told her exactly where Alaric stood in these matters, and she felt that with his boyish prejudices he would regard every fresh evidence of her knowledge of forbidden things as witness of her capacity for guilt.

The lie had been told, it had been persisted in.

It left its trail over all. She apologized for it, but it was not to be further discussed. This was where the battle royal would be waged, round the standard of her privilege to be above the law. He would conceive that as she had sinned, he was at liberty to carry the inquisition into her whole character; she, with a woman's instinct, would decline to be dissected, knowing that it must breed contempt without gain of any further knowledge. Then because he could not have his way and tear her to bits, he would persuade himself that she was guilty.

The affair would certainly develop, for each according to temperament had the lover's genius, which tortures itself in flames.

For a little Jenny's letter calmed him. She loved him—so much, at least, she asserted. She explained why she had gone to London. Firstly, to spare his aunt a scene; secondly, that he might have his opportunity of giving her up. This much she declared was only fair. A third reason she frankly admitted—she had been afraid. She had played the coward.

Unreasonably Alaric told himself that if she really loved him, she could not have suggested the excuse of giving him his freedom. Lovers do not want to be treated reasonably; they desire to be loved passionately and recklessly.

So that Alaric's surcease from the pangs of tortured love was not for long.

He breakfasted with his aunt, and managed to conduct himself with such self-control that Miss Burne began to wonder if he had not accepted what was, in her opinion, the inevitable.

She knew nothing of Jenny's letter, or she might not have judged so hastily. True to the instincts of her class, she hated interfering except when absolutely necessary, and then it was a thing to be done with as little officiousness as possible.

Now that it was too late, a neighbour who drove over that afternoon told her that Alaric had been seen about Seaborough with Jenny Oldcastle, the Duke of Glamoy's *protégée*.

"I admire his taste, Isabel. She is delicious, quite a little patrician to look at, and absolutely unlike an actress in her ways. I wonder where Alaric met her?"

"He tells me she has returned to town."

"Then you knew all about it? What a nice boy Alaric is. No nasty secrets. At the same time, it is rather dreadful, isn't it?—that old man, and a girl who suggests Psyche."

"Alaric saved her life," said Miss Burne, selecting another colour of silk from her work-basket.

"So I heard, and that's how it came about."

Miss Burne looked up sharply. The last remark suggested that people were coupling Alaric's name with Miss Oldcastle in no acceptable way.

"Who would have thought that Alaric would grow into a strong young man and go about saving distressed maidens. I do hope, dear, he hasn't fallen in love with her; but there, our young men have to go through this sort of thing, don't they? My experience is that the richer they are the sooner they get over it. That is only natural. They learn to value the thing at its true proportions."

"Perhaps," murmured Miss Burne a little frigidly.

"Oh, my dear, I didn't know it was as bad as that," answered the other, quick to resent what she imagined to be a snub. "Your voice is an absolute tragedy."

Miss Burne slew the incipient scandal as far as she could with a pleasant laugh.

"Oh, that's right," continued her tormentor. "It's what is to be expected of a boy, good-looking and rich. In a year or two some nice girl of his own class will put matters right. I wish he and my Sybilla could hit it off."

The lady had no pride about saying this. Sybilla was pretty and an heiress. For Alaric's sake Miss Burne preserved her amiability.

The lady, who had heard of Alaric and Jenny taking tea on the beach together several afternoons running, went away without the satisfaction of feeling that she had been the bearer of disturbing news.

CHAPTER XVII

AS for Alaric, his unhappiness increased with the hours. The world was empty of what it should have held, and full of misery. The jealousy which grew upon him was quite beyond his control. He was not sure that the thing which he considered he had chosen from all the world was his, and the thought was hell. The shrine he was heir to had been desecrated, and his rage ebbed and flowed unceasingly. At one moment he told himself that the only thing to do was to kill the Duke. He might be hanged for it, and that would embitter the whole of Jenny's existence. She could never be happy again. That was the savage part of him which wanted her to feel that he was a power. Such is the curious way of love. The really passionate lover does not desire the happiness of the beloved as a thing apart from his own. He desires happiness together or misery apart.

Jealousy will have its fling in all natures, and it was this quality which rose most prominently to the surface. His imagination ran riot amongst the possibilities should Jenny be telling a lie,

should she be the creature the situation argued her to be.

It must be true that she was such a creature. He laughed sardonically. He was not the oaf she took him to be. She had played her part wonderfully. Well, she was an actress, and that was natural!

Poor Alaric laboured under the delusion that a successful theatrical star is necessarily possessed of histrionic gifts.

That she should have been laughing at him—that was the bitter part! By degrees her letter became of little value. He persuaded himself that he did not believe it. Had it been true she would have left the Duke.

He waited two days before he called at the rectory to see Mrs. Goodchild, but she had gone. The rectory was closed, the blinds drawn, pending the return of its inmates.

He wrote a wild letter in reply to hers, full of madness and misery. Of course he told her he never wished to see her again, that he never would see her again, when the mere idea of such a thing was torture. It was strangely at variance with the cry which would break from his lips as he wandered in the grey, drizzling rain by the sea at evening.

“Jenny, I want you, I want you.”

He wept for her during the night as a lost soul, and woke in the morning with a dumb aching at his heart. His aunt watched him, silent and helpless, during the most unhappy week she had known since the flight of his mother.

Then, just as she had come to the conclusion that unofficiousness had its limits, he disappeared. He

took an independent line of action which was new to him, and, packing a bag, left one morning before she was up, for London.

She could not resent this. After all, he was his own master, and on reflection she saw that the way to nurse this intolerable romance was to brood over it. It was obvious he had gone to London to try and see Jenny, but in London he must also make other friends. He must distribute himself over a larger area, and in this there was hope. Indeed, Miss Burne rather comforted herself with the theory that the whole thing was the result of inexperience and would take its true proportion as Alaric saw more of life.

CHAPTER XVIII

FEW really know London. To anyone who desired to make an absolute study of it there would open up a lifetime of adventure. It speaks to the inquiring soul in a richer and more copious language than any other capital in the world.

London meant to Alaric a black coat and a tall hat, a town get-up, not too smart; that was left to the cosmopolitans, over-smartness not being necessarily vulgar, but antagonistic to that peculiar ease of appearance which marks the English gentleman.

In the seventies and eighties nobody who considered good form at all went about in anything but a tall hat and black coat. A straw hat might be worn through August. At all other times a man without a tall hat and black coat was considered eccentric.

To Alaric at the present moment London meant Jenny. It was a world of theatres, illicit connections, and wicked, wealthy, and high placed old gentlemen, who led young maidens astray. The place was garish with infamy. The poor lad's mind

was for the time diseased, and he had reduced himself to a condition when the world had a bad outlook.

Jenny's photographs were in the shop-windows by hundreds, and he was obliged to admit that they were free from the tawdry.

He went to look at the outside of his house in Cavendish Square, let to a fashionable physician. He had dreamed of living in that house with Jenny, and he turned away disconsolately. A dozen times he made up his mind to go and see her, to pour out his rage and jealousy upon her. A dozen times he changed his mind.

He took a stall for the Oddities with a half-expectation of seeing her on the stage. He was weirdly curious to see her behind the footlights, to note how she bore the setting of pinchbeck. He wondered how she would feel if he rose and denounced her; he even planned such a denunciation in his mind with great circumstance, for there is no sublimated nonsense which youth in love will not picture. A glance at the programme told him that she was still out of the bill. A fair doll with a smirk was taking her place.

"I wonder," said a well-groomed youth near him, "when Jenny Oldcastle is coming back. She's absolutely the thing, you know."

"Gone for a long holiday, I suppose. No need for her to overwork herself. Glamoy's sees to that."

Alaric whitened. He had a difficulty in restraining himself from falling upon the speaker and gripping him by the throat, but he controlled himself, and when the mad impulse was over reflected

that, after all, the youth was only repeating the scandal of the town.

"Nothing in it, they say. Father and daughter, and all that sort of thing."

"Grandfather and granddaughter," laughed his neighbour.

"Great-grandfather and great-granddaughter, if it comes to that," was the brilliant retort.

That a woman could be so talked of constituted guilt in Alaric's eyes. The scene on the stage swam before him in a mist flecked with flashes of bright colour. The orchestra crashed mere noise into his ears. He rose and went out, unable to bear it.

The band was playing the song which Jenny had made famous, and the strains pursued him through the heavily carpeted corridor into the street. A girl, pretty and quite modest in appearance, gave him a sidelong smile, not at all the brazen smile that report would lead people to believe is necessary to her calling.

He was young, he was miserable, and the situation of the girl struck him as being infinitely pathetic. With a shudder he thought that Jenny—no, he could not imagine such a thing. He went back. The girl met him with a faint smile of welcome.

"I want to give you this, please," he said, and passed two ten-pound notes into her hand and walked quickly away. The action—he could not say why—comforted him enormously. It made him a little tender towards Jenny, for whom, since his arrival in London, his feelings had risen in a crescendo of resentment.

Perhaps his loneliness had accentuated his morbid mood.

At one moment—for he was young and desperately in love—he contemplated suicide. It was his desire to be in her life. She must feel remorse when she heard that his dead body had been found in the dingy hotel bedroom.

He did not commit suicide, but found himself on his way to Kingston, with a sudden determination to see her again at all costs. He went down in a hansom, which he left at the gates of Glamoy's Lodge, and walked resolutely to the front door without giving himself time to think. The one thing which would have made him pause he took no account of—the fact that he was seeking an interview with her in another man's house, in the house of the man he regarded as the incarnation of Satan.

The servant, leaving Alaric in the morning-room, went to see if Jenny were at home, and Alaric, left alone, took stock of Jenny's gilded cage. There was certainly no evidence of a riotous life; the servant was quiet and respectful, and the large Persian cat lying in a patch of sunlight was quite respectable too, more respectable perhaps than an English cat would have been. Alaric grew a little white as he waited, and his heart beat fast. Would she refuse to see him? Was the Duke in the house—a thought which only just came to him. Perhaps she would send Mrs. Goodchild to him. Now that he was there he almost hoped that she would.

The servant returned to say that Miss Oldcastle would see him. He followed into the

drawing-room, which was at the back of the house.

In a few minutes Jenny opened the door and came in. For a moment Alaric was melted towards her, and his first impulse was to take her in his arms and bear her away from this ogre's castle at any cost.

She looked very lovely, but there were great shadows under her eyes, and she had grown curiously wan. No lover can be insensible to such a compliment.

He looked at her quickly and then fixed his eyes in front of him. He was determined she should not play the fool with him again.

"How do you do, Alaric?" She held out her hand. "It is nice of you to come and see me."

Then he realized the weakness of his position. She had not asked him to come. It was he who had sought her out.

He was not to be cheated of his due, however. She should know that he was not the eternal fool. The lie she had told him lashed him like a whip, and his anger surged up again. There was a silence.

"I'm glad to see you, Alaric." She spoke quite humbly.

"Really!" It was boyish satire, but she loved him, and it hurt horribly. She knew she had been in the wrong. She wanted to make every allowance for him. She was honest by nature; she was deeply humiliated by what she had done, and she wanted him to know it. Besides, she was a woman, and humility became her. Above all, she wanted him to realize that she claimed no rights.

"I thought perhaps you wouldn't come—that you would never speak to me again."

She breathed a little quickly. The self-abasement was not pleasant, even to Alaric, but it was done, and she was not called upon to go further.

Alaric was obdurate.

"Perhaps that was what you wanted."

"Alaric!" Still some apology in the voice, and little self-assertion.

"I suppose I ought not to have come. It would have shown greater pride if I had kept away."

"But you got my letter?"

"Yes."

"I explained everything."

"You admitted everything. That was easy!"

The note of Jenny's voice changed a little. "Do you think so? I didn't find it easy. I didn't find it easy at all."

Alaric had read somewhere in a cheap novel of a man who married a gentle creature of apparent breeding, who one day flung out at him like a drab, revealing her true character and origin. He wondered if Jenny were capable of such a thing; if her attitude were all acting, and if behind the finely polished exterior there lay potential tornadoes of horror—avalanches of slime.

"I am glad of that." He laughed bitterly. "What a fool you must have thought me."

"I don't understand you."

He felt a certain brutality developing within him.

"I mean, what a fool you must have thought me when I swallowed lie after lie, as many as you liked to tell me."

"You mustn't say that, Alaric." She touched the flanks of her pride very gently with the spur.

"You mustn't say that," she repeated quietly, with some of the gentleness gone out of her voice.

"How you must have laughed!"

"No."

"Why did you do it?"

This appeal softened her again completely. "I told you how it happened in my letter. I am sorry if you don't believe me."

"You really expect me to believe that?"

"What I said was true. If you don't believe me I can't help it. I thought perhaps you would understand, that you would see things as they are. That you don't is my punishment."

The last words came out with an effort.

"And what about my punishment?"

"Don't you see, Alaric, that what I said was said on the impulse of the moment? I wanted you to think well of me—I suddenly found it difficult to explain, and then when I wanted to explain, the lie I had told made it almost impossible for me to put things right. And I never thought——" she was about to say "I never thought we should love each other," but instead she gave way completely for the moment, and, clasping her hands, said simply, "Oh, Alaric, please believe me."

Alaric was almost on the point of surrendering, but again the whole horror of things as he conceived them to be surged up in him, and he went along the fatal road of insult.

“ A horrible old man ! ”

Jenny started as though she had been shot. Her first impulse was to ask Alaric to go, but instead she said sharply :

“ I won't listen to that, Alaric. I won't listen to it.”

The defence of the Duke stung him into fierce rage. He was to be deceived, to be reduced to wretchedness, but the feelings of this old debauchee were sacred. It roused him into fury.

He came over to her and his eyes blazed into hers.

“ Do you know, I don't think a woman like you ought to be allowed to live? I could kill you myself. I shall never believe in a woman again as long as I live.”

She met his gaze unflinchingly, looking so unutterably lovely that his senses ached.

“ You won't understand.”

“ That is what I want you to understand. That is why I have come here to-day. I understand everything. Good heavens—do you think I can be made to believe more lies? Go on—let me hear them—they will amuse me. Tell me more about your father.”

“ Alaric, don't ! You are cruel and you are not like yourself.”

“ Who has made me different ? ”

“ Why do you talk to me like this ? ”

“ Because I love you still, I suppose,” he said, with a little sob in his voice ; “ and because I want to make you suffer as I have suffered. I love you—do you hear ?—I love you. I ought not to admit it. I ought to have more pride, but I don't

believe people in love have any pride. I suppose it pleases you to hear me say I love you? Why don't you answer me?"

"I'm glad you love me still, Alaric."

"Yes, I love you, but it's not the love I thought it was. It's a low, beastly sort of love. The sort of love you've been accustomed to."

"Oh, how dare you! It's not true!"

"It is true. Do you think you're going to get rid of me like a dog, and not hear the truth? You shall hear it."

A faint smile of scorn was playing round her lips. He interpreted it as amusement, the result of gratified vanity.

"Don't laugh at me. Don't dare to laugh at me."

He stamped his foot almost childishly.

"You had better go, Alaric. You will say things you will regret all your life."

He laughed wildly.

"Regret having told you what I think of you—never! I shall be glad of that."

"No; if you care for me at all you will hate yourself for having wronged me. I didn't think it was in you to say such things."

He seized her wrists, but she made no effort to free herself. She looked at him coldly. He could hardly have said afterwards if her gaze were pity or contempt.

"No, you thought me too shy. I'm not shy with you now, am I? I know you. I'm not the first man who has taken you in his arms, but they couldn't love you as I love you, whoever they are—I don't care if there were ten thousand others.

Come, let's begin again on the footing you do understand. Why don't you answer ? ”

The great brown eyes continued their examination of him as if he were some strange being, and she were measuring his possibilities.

“ You do understand.”

“ You are mad ! ”

The voice was hard and sounded unemotional ; an insult under the circumstances.

“ Women make men mad.” The tone was a little ashamed.

“ I told you a lie and I am ashamed and sorry ; but I want to know whether you intend to believe that what I tell you now is true.”

“ A woman who could live a lie as you did cannot expect to be believed.”

“ You think me vile ? ”

And in a moment of insanity Alaric flashed out :

“ Yes.”

Jenny stood for a moment still as death.

“ Let me kiss you,” he said, seizing her ; “ you owe me something. You've made a fool of me. Give yourself to me. That damned old man will never know.”

He knew that he did not mean a word he was saying. He did not even want to insult her. It was as if some demon were speaking out of his mouth. The words came in a torrent, almost epileptically, and he ended with a laugh—theatrical, ineffective but for a certain gasp of pain at the end of it.

Then something was looking at him he had not seen before, a something terrible, which had never

been Jenny. The power which was in her for a moment dazzled. It was not all rage which transfigured her, although rage was there. It was primarily scorn, such a lightning scorn as that with which goddesses must have slain the presumption of mortals. That she, who had carried her virginity triumphantly through a London slum when the excuse of poverty was keenest, that she, who had grown purer on a life which coarsens most women, should have had this epithet hurled at her was devilish. Only a thunderbolt could answer, something to slay, to strike dumb, and this Jenny, out of the white heat of her resentment, hurled. Alaric tried to utter an apology, a wild cry of abject sorrow, but his tongue clave to the roof of his mouth. She did not even order him to go, never to come in her sight again. She left him, closing the door quietly, but its closing was the barring of heaven's gates for ever. He felt himself falling, falling as the angels of old must have fallen, with horror in his soul.

He stood for a moment dazed. He was the injured party, and yet Jenny had all the honours of war. He at once set down her handling of him to her wickedness, her training.

"I suppose they are all like it," he murmured brokenly. He knew in his inmost heart he was talking nonsense, and had anybody been present the futility of it would have sounded pathetic.

The sunlight shone garishly on the white and gold panelling of the room. It was the first cold day of the year, and the old ship-logs on the fire sent up blue and violet flames.

It was all quite different from what he had

expected. He was obliged to confess that everything about her confirmed Mrs. Goodchild's version of her.

Somehow he found himself back in London with the full intention of taking the next train home. It was all over. The thing was ended.

CHAPTER XIX

THE late afternoon found him gazing aimlessly at a bag which was not yet packed. To go home was like cutting himself off for ever from Jenny. There was a great comfort in being in town with the possibility of seeing her. So long as this condition of affairs lasted he was on her horizon at least, and though he would not confess as much to himself, there was the faint hope of a way out, of a reconciliation of fire.

He was still thinking of his journey back when the somewhat stale-looking waiter brought him in a card which he delivered with a certain added ceremony to his usual mechanical actions. Barons they were not unused to, lords stayed there at times, but dukes, real dukes of great wealth like Glamoys, were rare, if not unknown. As Alaric read the name his heart beat furiously and the colour flew to his face.

He had never met a duke, although there were dukes and duchesses pendant on collateral branches of his family tree, and his own position was just as good for social purposes as theirs. He was about to answer, "Tell him I'm not at home," when his

breeding changed the remark to, "Tell the Duke I'm not at home"; then again the something which a position like the Duke's commands caused him to change it once more to, "Tell his Grace I'm not at home."

The waiter almost hesitated. Who was this chevalier of twenty odd to say "No" to one of the greatest nobles in the kingdom? Knights and baronets were all chevaliers to this benighted foreigner. He knew not the glamour shed by hereditary glory, and that never as a nation will the British bow the knee to honours besmirched by effort.

The man departed and watched the Duke's face as he delivered the message, waiting for the slight curl of the lip which should have shown noble contempt for this boyish impertinence. Instead, the Duke smiled, in a gentle, kindly way, and sitting down, wrote a few lines which he asked the waiter to take up to Sir Alaric.

In reply Alaric descended to the dingy private room into which the Duke had been shown.

His heart beat somewhat faster as he entered. Perhaps at the back of his mind he had an instinct that his attitude towards the Duke was unjust. It was not surprising that he was nervous. He felt the disadvantage of his own youth and inexperience, of the other's tremendous reputation.

This all gave him a defiant attitude when he meant it to be sceptical and contemptuous. Realizing his incapacity to convey the particular effect desired, his temper immediately became on edge.

"Sir Alaric Burne?"

"Yes."

"I am the Duke of Glamoy's."

Alaric did not answer, but gazed at the Duke with an expression of tragic gloom.

"First of all I should like you to understand that Miss Oldcastle is quite ignorant of my visit here."

Alaric was still silent.

"Shall we sit down?"

"I would rather stand."

"You won't mind my sitting down? The struggle for youth is nearly over, and I get tired."

Alaric made a perceptible sound of anger.

"Come, Sir Alaric, keep your temper with me for a few minutes, and then perhaps you will keep it altogether."

"Why did you wish to see me?"

Glamoy's gave an almost imperceptible sigh of impatience. It was not pleasant to have to endure the rudeness of this love-sick boy. Still, for Jenny he would have done more. He allowed no trace of irritation to appear in his voice.

"You will perhaps believe me when I tell you that the happiness of Miss Oldcastle is the most important thing in my life, and——"

It was difficult, almost impossible, in such a conversation to avoid touching Alaric on the raw. The Duke's remark sounded to Alaric like a piece of insolent cynicism. He broke in with white lips.

"What has this to do with me?"

"Please listen." The Duke paused—the young gentleman was obviously ready to explode. His imagination was a fuse electrically charged. The

Duke did the wisest thing under the circumstances and came within striking distance.

"Miss Oldcastle has told me that she was foolish enough to give you a wrong impression as to my relations with her."

Alaric drew himself up as if he had been shot.

"Your Grace!" He moved towards the door.

The Duke hardly raised his voice, but his gently spoken, "Patience, Sir Alaric," kept Alaric in the room.

"Because of that deception you have drawn, I fancy, a wrong conclusion."

There was a pause. Alaric threw his head back and his short upper lip became shorter. The Duke met his fiery glance with absolute calm, and continued, "Yes, Sir Alaric, an absolutely false conclusion."

Alaric realized that a display of temper to this experienced old man of the world was of little use. He imitated, as far as he could, the other's restraint, and asked coldly: "What do you mean?"

The Duke made the slightest gesture of protest.

"Is there any need for a further explanation? Is it quite fair to ask for it?"

The jealous rage and fury seething within Alaric prevented his preserving an appearance of phlegm for long, the thing he most desired. He answered haughtily:

"I suppose you must have some meaning, but I don't follow you."

The Duke could have smiled at these theatricals, but for his being very much alive to their seriousness for the boy. He continued, striving to give

as little offence as possible to a mood which was determined to find it :

“ Sir Alaric, you are in love with Miss Oldcastle, and I think you would make her an excellent husband.” He knew there was danger in such a blunt statement, but it was best to get it over.

“ Thank you,” answered Sir Alaric, with a magnificent display of irony. “ Good God ! ” he added, almost to himself, as if the splendid insolence of the remark had taken his breath away.

“ The way I put it may seem a little abrupt, but I want you to understand the position exactly.”

“ What position ? ”

The Duke was quite aware that in tactfully allowing Alaric to make a certain display he was drawing him into a discussion.

“ By the position I mean the relations in which you, and I, and Miss Oldcastle stand to each other.”

“ I am interested to learn that you and I stand in any relations.”

Alaric's remarks were becoming more and more heated. The presence of the Duke exasperated him. According to all the canons with which he had been brought up, the ancient roué should have shrunk from the direct gaze of shining youth. Instead, he found someone who seemed morally quite at his ease. It was disconcerting. Alaric could only put it down to cynical heartlessness and a conscience which had predeceased its owner. In addition, the Duke's good humour was unendurable.

“ Come, Sir Alaric, there is nothing to be gained by our barking at each other. It doesn't help us.

I understand you asked Miss Oldcastle to be your wife."

Alaric gave a sharp, mirthless laugh, intended to convey how entirely he agreed that such a thing had been highly humorous. The Duke flushed faintly. An insult to himself might be passed over; an insult to Jenny was under the circumstances unpardonable. He had expected Alaric to see this. His voice was a little harder as he proceeded.

"And that when you discovered who she was you concluded that the deception she had practised was intended to cover a state of things which did not exist."

"It seems to me that that is a question for Miss Oldcastle and myself to settle."

"Which you have attempted to do with very little success.

"It is still our affair."

"I don't agree. Miss Oldcastle stands in the relation to me of a ward." He waited for Alaric to challenge the statement, but somehow Alaric did nothing of the kind. He continued, after a pause: "If your feelings towards Miss Oldcastle have utterly changed, I have nothing more to say. If, however, you cannot assure me that you are no longer in love with her——"

Alaric grew insolent.

"Why should I assure you of anything of the kind? What right have you to ask me?"

"I have told you," answered Glamoyes. Nevertheless he tried another line.

"I admit my position is very difficult."

"Very difficult. I can well believe it."

The Duke grew impatient. He rose and walked to the window. It was not easy to bear with this young man. His lack of any knowledge of the world put him in a matter of this kind where a boy of seventeen would have stood. The Duke began to wonder what had fascinated Jenny, undeniably handsome as the boy was—and, of course, a gentleman. He was a little disappointed. He had expected more of her fastidiousness, if not from her judgment. He made a final attempt to get on terms with the youth and moving towards the mantelpiece stood with his back to it, facing Alaric.

“Sir Alaric, I am a man old enough to be your grandfather. You will, I hope, not think that I wish to patronize you when I say that I have seen more of life than most men. Position and wealth enlarge a man’s opportunities just as they limit a woman’s. It is because of my greater experience that I am sure Miss Oldcastle’s happiness would be safe in your hands.”

He paused, wondering how he had come to say this and somehow to believe it. The natural sweetness of his nature made him energetic in trying to put these young people right with each other. Alaric did not answer him. What the Duke was saying was sheer hypocrisy; to his mind it was impossible it could be anything else. As the Duke continued his voice grew softer.

“Love only comes to us in perfection once in our lives. Believe me, it is the great thing by which our lives are tested. No wise man laughs at the loves of young people. Only those who are playing at being wise despise the sunshine of life.

Man has grown into the habit of torturing himself for a happiness he can't be sure of, and lets go by the joy that can be his if he will only grasp it. Therefore be sure that you are acting wisely—that this anger of yours is not merely an expression of injured vanity."

There was a silence. Alaric did not answer, and the Duke concluded almost tenderly:

"Be sure of that, Sir Alaric; be sure of that."

Alaric's nature was naturally impressionable and under any ordinary circumstances the Duke's speech would have played with effect on his temperament, but when he thought of this man and his rights over Jenny, he hated him.

"I will be sure of that. I should be glad to know by what right your Grace presumes to patronize me. My family is as good——"

The Duke raised his hand in protest. This was descending to the ridiculous and the vulgar.

"Genealogy will not help us, Sir Alaric. Cupid has none."

"You are too clever for me." The meaning was obvious that the Duke was too full of worldly cunning.

"I ask you to treat Miss Oldcastle fairly. She is her own mistress. She is not in need of approbation from either of us unless she seeks it. Her private fortune——"

Alaric gasped with rage.

"Her private fortune!"

"I said, her private fortune."

"How dare you! How dare you make such an infamous proposal to me."

The words were spoken with such fury, with

such an utter lack of self-control that the Duke was amazed. He was for the moment bewildered.

"Infamous!"

"You think because I've no experience of the world that I don't know what all this means. It is infamous."

"Am I to understand, Sir Alaric, that you doubt my word?"

"It seems to me that you forget that you are speaking to an English gentleman."

"That was my impression."

"Then you have strange notions. You dare to insult me by proposing to buy me because you want to rid yourself of an encumbrance of which you have grown tired."

"An encumbrance of which I have grown tired? I don't follow you." And it was true. The Duke could hardly believe that anyone could have the audacity to make such an accusation to his face.

Alaric, however, was beside himself with rage. Had the Duke been a young man he would have been at his throat. He was white to the lips, and quivering from head to foot. "Is it necessary to keep up the pretence? At any rate you may be sure of one thing. I see through it."

But the Duke was almost equally roused.

"Are you accusing me of attempting to pay you to—oh, I won't say it!" He put the insinuation aside with a gesture of disgust.

"Yes, I do think that!"

"Then, by God——!"

The Duke made a movement and seized the cane which he had left upon the table. He had some thought, clear-headed as he was, of whipping this

youth there and then. He controlled himself, however. As far as he was concerned he had no further desire to propitiate Alaric.

"At the cost of seeming ridiculous I regret that gentlemen are not permitted to settle their quarrels in an effectual manner. I can only say that the lady is well rid of a man who could suggest such a thing of the woman he loves."

"I did not accuse Miss Oldcastle of knowing of your offer."

"Offer! It is not in my power to make any offer——" He broke off with a gesture of anger. "At any rate I do not now regard you as fit to be Miss Oldcastle's husband."

"Not fit! If you only knew what I think of men like you. Men whose lives have been one long horror."

Again the Duke was roused almost to violence.

"I am an old man, or——"

"Yes, you are damned old, and damned horrible!"

The insult was so outrageous, so vindictive that it silenced both men for a moment. Alaric could not be otherwise than ashamed at having uttered it.

The Duke's anger had entirely disappeared. He took up his hat and stick.

"You are a vulgar fellow, Sir Alaric; a very vulgar fellow."

No man less sure of himself could have left the room with such a perfect absence of confusion in his manner.

Alaric felt that he had not scored, that he had in no sense come off with honour or dignity, and

that if what he had said were repeated to Jenny she must inevitably despise him. He had only made himself feel ten times more miserable, and had by his display of rage degraded himself in the sight of the man he would have given anything to have impressed.

He sat for a long time looking at the blank wall which faced the window. It seemed to be typical of the condition at which his life had arrived—a point beyond which there was nothing. Youth is like that. It is emotionally not nearly so optimistic as age. Its tragedy is always the final one. Its romance is always the last.

After a long time he rose with a weary sigh. It was all over. Jenny was a thing of the past. Life might never be the same again, but he must put all thoughts of her away. And this he said to himself knowing that he should do nothing of the kind.

CHAPTER XX

IN the meantime the Duke was driving rapidly towards Kingston. His face was set and angry. Once he murmured :

“To insult her—to insult her ! We shall see. We shall see !”

The words were spoken with determination as if he had made up his mind as to some strong course.

He had not told Jenny of his intended visit to Alaric. He was quite sure that her pride would have raised the strongest objections. He had hoped to play the part of the benignant parent, and the first flash of anger over, his sense of humour was too keen for him not to smile over his discomfiture. He had dreamed of putting matters entirely right with Alaric, and of bearing him back in triumph to Glamoy's Lodge. “I must indeed be getting old,” he murmured with a smile, “to interfere—it isn't like me. Officious old ass !”

Good judge as he was of men, he over-estimated Alaric's manner towards himself as a test of character. Perhaps, however benevolent

his intentions, he was not sorry that the boy should have put himself at a disadvantage.

He did not know that Alaric had that morning been to Glamoy's Lodge. Had he done so, and had he been acquainted with what had happened between him and Jenny, he would have conducted his interview differently, if he had entered upon it at all.

He found Jenny in a state of artificial self-control. Her pride had been fully roused. She was prepared never to mention Alaric's name again. The things he had said were things she told herself she could never forget. The desire was in her to strike back. There was nothing mawkish about her and she would have liked to make him feel her power to avenge herself. She greeted the Duke with a brave smile.

"I have seen your Sir Alaric," he said as he sank a little wearily into a chair by the fire.

"How did you know him?" The remark had only conveyed to Jenny that the Duke had met Alaric in the street.

"I went to see him. I called on him at his hotel."

Jenny looked at him startled.

"How did you know he was in London?"

"That I found out by accident."

"He was here this morning."

It was the Duke's turn to look surprised. He had not reckoned with Alaric's visit to Jenny. Perhaps his seeking him out had been a blunder.

"I told him that you knew nothing of my visit."

Jenny sighed with relief. It would have been

too humiliating if, after what had occurred in the morning, Alaric had deemed her capable of sending the Duke as an ambassador.

"Jenny," said the Duke with sudden energy, as the memory of Alaric's insult came over him, "don't think any more about him. He's not worth it. He's——"

Jenny came over and put her hand on his mouth.

"Hush, dear. I'm not going to think any more about him, but don't abuse him."

"I didn't think it possible that any man would have dared to say such things to me."

There was a pause. It was almost dark.

The servant came in and shut up the room. The Duke asked for a brandy and soda. Whilst it was being brought they sat in silence.

When they were alone again Jenny came and sat beside him on the couch, putting her hand in his.

"You must get over this, Jenny," said Glamoy's gently.

"I mean to. You mustn't think, Daddy, that I haven't any pride—only you see I was to blame."

"No, I am the one to blame. I should have made things clearer to the world."

"The world believes what it wants to believe. I——"

There was a little break in her voice, but the Duke felt a stiffening of the muscles of the arm leaning against him.

"Does it hurt very much?"

The tenderness and understanding in the voice broke Jenny's power of restraint. She laid her

head down on his shoulder, crying gently. Thus they sat for quite a long time, he stroking her hair and comforting her as best he could.

"Don't cry, my dear. We'll make it up to you somehow. Your heart shan't be broken for a damned——"

"Don't. Oh, don't!"

"I beg your pardon." He waited till she was calmer, holding her hand in his, and pressing it comfortingly now and then.

At last there was complete silence between them. He was thinking deeply—thinking of what Jenny's future would be when he was gone. He had felt quite justified in leaving her a fairly large fortune. His only daughter was enormously rich, both by reason of her mother's fortune and her settlements. He was too just, and had too strong a sense of his position, to do anything which might cripple his heir. The money he was leaving Jenny was his own to do as he liked with. With all his splendour and love of life he had never been other than a shrewd man of business, and he had been brought up as a child, like most of his class, to say no when necessary.

Jenny would be rich, very rich, taking into consideration that she would have no responsibilities. Nevertheless, her position would be difficult. He felt somehow that with the advent of Alaric her theatrical days were over, however her love affair might end.

He had the utmost confidence in her capacity to fill a responsible position, but he would have given a great deal to see her married, and to see her married to a man who would place her socially.

He had, through the difficulties which surrounded the situation, seen a happy future assured for her. Alaric would come round. He knew several noble dames who, on his giving his word of honour that they might do so, would stand sponsor for Jenny. Great social position had been achieved by a small greengrocer's daughter without a character. He had more than once taken the lady, a countess, in to dinner with the most brilliant company. The lesser aristocracy and plutocracy might try to scotch Jenny's career, but they would be bound to accept her if her poise and conduct were unimpeachable. As far as that went, Jenny had enough manner to carry off the position of a duchess and——

He stopped at this point and sat up. The insults Alaric had hurled at him rankled. He would give everything he had to show the young man how high in respect he held Jenny. Was it madness to dream of doing such a thing? For a great idea had come into his brain.

"Jenny," he said gently, "there's something I've never quite explained—something which I don't think you've ever quite understood."

"Yes, Daddy, what is it?"

"Do you remember the first night I met you?"

"Why of course."

"What friends we were at once—You trusted me directly—do you remember?"

"Yes, Daddy, why?"

"I was so bewildered. It was almost as if my springtime had come again. We old people have these dreams sometimes."

"You're not old, Daddy. Everyone says you're

the youngest man in England for your age, and the comic papers all call you the Young Duke."

"The comic papers, do they? That's very good of them. You see, it's their business to be funny."

"Yes."

"As I said, we old people dream of spring sometimes. We laugh and dance and often imagine ourselves in love again—and sometimes make ourselves ridiculous, until we notice the clear, happy eyes of youth looking at us with contempt."

His tone was sad, just a little bitter.

"Don't talk like that, Daddy. It hurts me."

"I was a foolish old man once, Jenny, and I fell in love with you."

There was a long silence. Jenny took his hand in hers and kissed it. All the gratitude for what he had done for her, and all the tenderness she felt for him were in that kiss.

"You have seen something of the world, and you will understand what I mean when I tell you that the test of my love for you was that I could never bring myself to offer you the love of a wicked old man like myself."

"Don't, you mustn't. You are great, and very good. I understand."

"Jenny, he called me 'damned old, and damned horrible.'"

It was strange that the Duke, with his armour of pride, should feel the remark of a boy beside himself with rage so acutely.

"He didn't dare!"

"It was crude, but I daresay he was right." He paused and looked reflective. "Do you know,

I can see you now as I saw you the first night we met, trying to dance."

"Trying to dance!" laughed Jenny.

The Duke's voice was full of whimsical pathos as he answered:

"You couldn't dance, my dear. You can't dance now, and I don't think you will ever dance."

"They used to think I could dance in Dean's Court."

"No, my dear, it was you they loved, not your dancing."

"Oh, I can dance a little." She was laughing through her tears.

"Yes, yes, a little. I don't know what it was that took me by storm."

"Don't you?" she said, nestling to him.

"Yes, I do know. It was your laugh. Your little giddy laugh, as the poet puts it:

'Her laugh would wake me just as now it thrills me,
That little giddy laugh with which she kills me.'

I am a fortunate old fellow to cross the river Styx with that laugh ringing in my ears."

"Why do you want to cross the river Styx?"

"I don't, but it's the river that divides the ways of life and death, Jenny. Death is the only true lover old people have. Perhaps, after all, death is more beautiful than life. It may be that is why her face is veiled—she is too beautiful to look upon——" He broke off and after a short silence said:

"I ought to tell you that I more or less asked that young man to marry you."

"Oh, how could you, after the things he had said to me?"

"I didn't know of them, and I was thinking of your happiness."

"I have forgotten him."

"As usual the person who interferes turns out to be a general nuisance. I have not often made that mistake. My object has been to leave to every man his own life." Jenny sensed the amusement in his voice as he continued: "Perhaps that is easy when one is very rich. But life should be easy. There is no real reason why it should be difficult."

"We don't want him. I have never met anyone so kind and good as you are. You are always picking people up who have fallen down."

The Duke made a comic gesture of dissent. "No, I won't have that. I'm not a philanthropist. I've not sunk so low as that."

"Oh, yes you have. You have been doing good all your life. You don't know, but I've noticed things. Why, your daughter, Lady Sarah, who I'm told belongs to half the societies in London for doing good, doesn't do half the good in a year which you do in a day."

"Sarah is strenuous. But why drag in Sarah?"

"I don't know."

The Duke rose to go.

"I'm dining with Crawchester quite quietly. He can't stand more than one person in the room at a time. Poor old fellow—so very old and fifteen years younger than I am by the clock."

She went out into the hall with him. The Duke looked back at her as he drove away. She was

standing in the brilliant light thrown by the hall-lamps. She looked wonderfully beautiful; a change had come over her. A beautiful woman, pale and worn with her first great sorrow, had replaced the sheer sweet loveliness of the child.

Very imperial she looked, too. He could not help noticing how she was gaining in splendour.

"She can't go back," he murmured, thinking of the theatre. "She's gone past that—clean past it."

Then again he thought of his great idea.

CHAPTER XXI

JENNY knew no member of the Duke's family save Moorshott. She knew that his son and heir had died childless, and that his daughter was married to a very rich commoner, one of the untitled nobility which so puzzle the foreigner, who cannot understand this tacit concession of rank. Jenny knew that on the Duke's death the title, and the estates which went with it, passed to a distant kinsman.

Of the Duke's daughter she knew hardly anything. From the little she had heard she did not picture her as a very lovable person.

She was taken absolutely by surprise when one morning as she was sitting reading French to Emma, the servant announced that Lady Sarah and Mr. Brent had called, and would be glad if she could see them.

The hour chosen was one when the Duke was never at Glamoy's Lodge, a fact which would seem to have been known and reckoned with.

Jenny turned to Emma helplessly. "What shall I do?"

Emma, as astonished as herself, looked thoughtful.

"Ask them to wait," she said, mainly in order to get rid of the servant.

"What can they want, I wonder?"

Jenny, from all she had heard of Lady Sarah, had a shrewd instinct as to what they wanted, and so for the matter of that had Emma, but neither liked to suggest it.

"Shall I see them?" asked Emma, half rising.

Jenny reflected deeply.

She had a conscience where the Duke's daughter was concerned, a feeling that Lady Sarah should be treated with absolute deference unless she put herself outside the courtesies.

She knew that the Duke regarded her evangelical energies with kindly toleration. He even accepted her indirect efforts for what she was pleased to call his conversion with good-nature and courtesy.

"I will see them," she said decidedly.

"You are right," answered Emma.

Jenny turned to the glass to see that there was nothing amiss with her appearance. It was no use opening a discussion with Emma as to what she was to say. There would only be time to confuse herself. She made for the drawing-room, to deal with the situation as best she might.

Lady Sarah was standing by the window as Jenny entered. She had never been in Glamoy's Lodge. It was associated with an incident in her father's life of which she knew vaguely. Her mother had hinted of it as something altogether discreditable, and not to be spoken of; the beauty of this romance between the loveliest woman of

her day, and her husband in his earliest manhood had passed her by. Lady Sarah knew the painting above the mantelpiece at once. She had often seen portraits of the runaway Marchioness of Dare.

Mr. Brent was at another window looking nervously down the garden away to the river beyond. He was not so sure of the wisdom or desirability of this visit as was his wife, although he was just as keen on poking his nose into the affair under the plea of doing the Lord's work.

They had had a certain amount of discussion whilst waiting for Jenny.

"Why have we come?" Brent had said suddenly, "and what are we going to say?"

"I have come, Henry, because it is my duty, and I shall say what I have all along intended to say. Something which I trust will touch this brazen woman's heart——"

"Is she brazen? She doesn't look brazen in her photographs."

"Photography has arrived at such a pitch of mendacity that it is demoralizing the public. Look at that man in Baker Street who photographed us. He made us look like Romeo and Juliet in a London fog."

Mr. Brent almost smirked.

"I thought it was a good likeness."

"It would take a man's vanity to arrive at such an opinion. Depend upon it this woman——"

"She is only eighteen."

"I reserve my opinion on that point."

Now as Lady Sarah looked at Jenny she realized

that there could be no possible deception about her age.

Jenny was immediately struck by the extraordinary likeness of Lady Sarah to her father. It was the Duke's face ; but his, though old, was a smiling land ; Lady Sarah's, though younger, was a blasted heath. She was obviously dyspeptic, but she herself was not so dyspeptic as her religious views. These were in advance of her own acidity. Her hair was gathered tightly off her forehead, and an old-fashioned bonnet was perched unsympathetically on the unbeautiful, smooth head. Her mouth was almost distorted with rigidity.

Mr. Brent, except for a certain sleekness incidental to the chronically rich, looked like the churchwarden of a third-rate parish. His hair was slightly red and he wore side-whiskers.

Lady Sarah, in spite of Jenny's portraits, had got it into her head that her father's *protégée* was brazen. She had taken it for granted that the photographs were intentionally deceptive. She expected defiance, and was prepared for it. She was not prepared for self-possession and good manners.

She flattered herself that she knew how to deal with the lower classes. She was profoundly ignorant of the good-humoured contempt with which her own class is viewed by the masses. She would have been astonished to learn that their instinct taught them that the Duke was a more moral entity than herself.

Jenny was a shock to them both. The fact that she was superior to what they expected did not by any means give them satisfaction. It was

true that she was just a little too well-dressed for a young girl. The day was cold and dull, and the thick white stuff dress, perfectly cut, argued a lavish wardrobe, which Lady Sarah would have considered improper in a millionairess.

Still, Lady Sarah was too experienced not to see the utter absence of vulgarity and the undeniable distinction at a glance, and it annoyed her. It annoyed her the more because she was quite insensible to beauty, either in men or women. She regarded beauty not as a gift but as a snare ; the greater the beauty so much the worse for the possessor.

Jenny advanced a little way into the room, and looked at Lady Sarah inquiringly. " Lady Sarah Brent ? "

" Yes." Lady Sarah's lips closed rather more tightly than usual, whilst in answer to Jenny's invitation she and Mr. Brent took chairs.

" Thank you," murmured Lady Sarah, hastily reconsidering her plan of campaign, which she realized not to be at all suitable to the individual before her. There was something about the brows of this young person, a grave caution and serenity, which made her feel quite nervous.

There was nothing to gain, however, by a display of weakness.

" Perhaps you can guess, Miss Oldcastle, why my husband and I have called ? "

The great brown eyes grew even more inscrutable. All that was Jenny seemed to pass into them, till Lady Sarah felt that she was a something standing insignificantly in their depths.

" I am afraid I can't."

"I am the Duke of Glamoys' daughter."

"Oh, yes, I know that."

Lady Sarah paused, wondering how long she would be able to bear the scrutiny of those eyes, and wishing that Mr. Brent could do something to divert it. She hurried on :

"I may as well come straight to the point. My father is an old man. Those nearest and dearest to him"—Jenny wondered if Lady Sarah could possibly mean herself—"have noticed with anxiety that he has considerably changed of late. Also we wish to point out that the matter we have called about is being exploited in the public press—indirectly, of course."

To Lady Sarah's great relief Mr. Brent here took up the running. She felt that even if he talked nonsense, as was usually the case, she would owe him a debt of gratitude, if it only resulted in Jenny's gaze concerning itself with him.

"We have to thank the general bad taste of the age, and the licence of the press, that the private affairs of highly placed persons are intruded upon in an unwarrantable manner ; yes, oh, yes, in an unwarrantable manner. Not content with laying violent hands on our landed property——"

"That will do, Henry."

Grateful as she was for the respite, she did not wish Mr. Brent to make himself too ridiculous.

Jenny was confused. She wondered what the taking of landed property had to do with it all, but as was her wont she waited patiently.

Lady Sarah continued. The spell of those eyes had been somewhat broken by their being removed for a moment from her face.

"The Duke's family, feeling that the whole affair has become, may I say, intolerable, will make any sacrifice to put a stop——"

Lady Sarah did not see the humour of interfering so late in the day with her father's way of life.

She paused without finishing her sentence. Jenny wanted the word.

"To what?" she asked.

"To—er——" Lady Sarah hesitated. It was not so easy to tell this young girl the plain, unvarnished truth as she had imagined it would be. She finished however: "the scandal."

There was a pause. Then Jenny spoke, her expression unchanged.

"Do you want to insult me?"

This was the sort of battle Lady Sarah could understand.

"I am aware I am putting myself in an invidious position."

Jenny's answer was an unconscious masterpiece.

"I am not quite sure that I know what 'invidious' means. I have not had a very good education."

Lady Sarah looked a little helpless. She felt that to explain what invidious meant would be to make herself ridiculous. Mr. Brent came to the rescue.

"An invidious position, Miss Oldcastle, means a position in which your opponent stands as good a chance as you do."

"Thank you. We none of us wish that, do we." Was it the faint beginnings of a smile Lady Sarah detected about the finely cut mouth

with its generous lines? Irony was not a quality she had looked for.

"Did you tell the Duke you were coming to see me?"

"My father is not a man who will brook interference."

"No."

"I appeal to you on behalf of the Duke's family."

"You appeal to me, why?"

"The spectacle of a man of the Duke's dignity and years—dragged here and there——"

She paused abruptly. The eyes had again become intolerable in their magnetic immobility.

"Yes?" encouraged Jenny gently.

"You must fully understand what I mean."

Jenny continued to gaze at her without speaking.

"We are willing to do anything in reason. I have come because, as I said, I cannot hide from myself that my father has very much aged of late, and that has given me the courage to interfere where before I should not have intruded into his private affairs." She paused, but as Jenny made no reply she added: "Well?"

"I have nothing to say."

"You refuse to discuss the situation?"

"There is nothing to discuss." Suddenly Jenny's almost majestic composure gave way. She flamed into anger and her voice took a sharp, almost menacing intonation.

"You are wrong—wrong from beginning to end, and——"

She stopped abruptly. Lady Sarah wondered why. She did not perceive that Jenny was keeping a tense watch over herself lest a relation of the Duke

should go away and say that she was common. It was this point of loyalty to his judgment which was occupying her, and this was what the sphinx-like gaze meant, if Lady Sarah could only have known it. She added quietly after her outburst :

“ I have nothing more to say.”

“ I did not imagine I should meet such terrible self-possession.”

Obviously the remark was meant to imply that Lady Sarah had not expected to meet such depravity. So obvious was the implication that even Mr. Brent was constrained to protest.

“ My dear Sarah ! ”

Jenny was genuinely concerned in trying to convince Lady Sarah that her view of the situation was wrong. She asked with unaffected sincerity :

“ Do you mean to say that you do not believe me ? ”

Lady Sarah made no answer.

“ If not, ask the Duke.”

“ It is not a subject I could ever mention to my father.”

This goaded even Jenny :

“ Because you dare not ? ”

“ Perhaps.”

“ But you come here and talk to me about it before this gentleman ? ”

“ That is different.”

“ I cannot see that.”

Lady Sarah considered. Money, when they wished to spend it, was no object to herself and her husband. Besides having an ample fortune of her own inherited through her mother, Mr. Brent was rich enough to draw a cheque for fifty

thousand pounds without crippling himself. They were prepared to do even this if they could accomplish what had become, the more they had talked it over, an obsession which must be satisfied at all costs. The Duke's good-humoured tolerance of them and their evangelical convictions had always exasperated them, and it would have been quite worth it if they could score a point against him. It was not so easy, however, to put the money question to this girl as she had imagined. She was as tentative as possible.

"You decline to enter into any arrangement?"

"I don't know what you mean."

This reply merely gave Lady Sarah the impression that the Duke had settled a handsome sum upon Jenny. She paused, somewhat at a loss, and Jenny added decisively: "And I don't wish to know what you mean."

There was that in the voice which brought Lady Sarah to her feet, an angry flush on her cheek.

"Then there is nothing more to be said."

"Nothing."

This being so, Lady Sarah let loose the flood-gates of her evangelicalism.

"It is excessively painful to us to see so young a soul perishing in the fires of wickedness without apparently the least knowledge of the gospels to guide her, or without making any attempt to seek out the path which alone can save sinners from perdition."

She paused, and Mr. Brent, now on thoroughly familiar ground, took up the running.

"We should have been prepared to show you the way to a better life—indeed, we should have

taken the greatest interest. I am myself the chairman of a home——”

Jenny's eyes flashed fire, but her speech was icy.

“Leave my house!”

The interview had been so foolish, indeed so futile, that Lady Sarah was anxious to get away.

“Henry, come. You are making yourself ridiculous.”

With a slight bow she swept from the room. Mr. Brent followed her to the door and then paused. As if seized by an uncontrollable impulse he drew from his pocket a bundle of leaflets, deposited it on the table nearest to him and followed his wife.

When Jenny was alone she stood silent, gazing in front of her with angry eyes. Her first inclination was to laugh. Then she remembered what Mr. Brent had said about a home. In her short life she had heard about such homes. There were two women in Dean's Court who used to regale their friends with their experiences of them.

“Them old cats used to come round and want to know where yer was ruined, 'ow yer was ruined, and 'oo done it, and my, didn't they look disappointed if there weren't no interestin' bits. Then the girls soon learned to put in what 'ud make the story go, and the wuss you was the more they done for yer. There was one girl as 'ad never been out of Pimlico, but she always said as it was a wicked markis as seed her cleanin' the steps and lured her from 'ome at seven o'clock in the mornin', and took 'er away in a lovely kerridge to a big 'ouse in the country, where all the servants bowed down to 'er.”

Jenny remembered these edifying discourses. She remembered much else about the homes, and her cheeks flamed at the thought that she should have been suggested as a suitable inmate. It hurt her the more because of Alaric's scorn.

How unhappy she was. Yet it was her character to become more impassive, more tearless, the more her heart ached.

She remained for so long a time alone that Emma, who knew the visitors had gone, came in search of her. Emma knew at once by her gravity and the steady poise of her head that there was little use in questioning her, and that when she had considered the interview carefully she would deliver herself on the subject.

CHAPTER XXII

CYNTHIA STEWART was a niece of the Duke's. Like him, she had a gift of youth, but in a different way. She looked every day of her sixty years, but a straight figure, commanding presence and lively intelligence of countenance indicated that her physical energy and her interest in life were unabated.

She and the Duke were great friends. She was only fifteen years younger than he was, and she remembered him at his zenith. As a young girl she had worshipped him as a conqueror among men. His eclecticism had dazzled her, as it dazzled most people. She, like many women, admitted that much was permitted to man which, in natural logic, can never be permitted to woman, and she had the tolerance of her class for the sex peccadilloes of its males. Perhaps in her girlhood's days she had loved Glamoy's; for nieces have loved and do love their uncles, indeed, in some countries they marry them.

As the years went by their friendship had grown. Neither of them was in sympathy with

their noble relatives, who were middle-class as only people cut off from the battle of life can be.

Suburbanism is a state of mind and not a geographical expression. Middle-class is likewise expressive of a state of mind, and not of social position. Lady Sarah, for instance, was a hopelessly middle-class lady.

"I don't know," the Duke had once said to Cynthia Stewart, "how you and I come to be so interesting. Our family must be, like the English nation, a race of mediocrities redeemed by brilliant exceptions."

"I have noticed," answered Cynthia, "that the arrival of a genius in a family has often the effect of stiffening the mediocrities."

"Self-defence: and it is certainly so in the case of Sarah. She disapproved of me as a child; at thirteen her method of going to church was a reproof. She made her confirmation the occasion of a demonstration against me of the church militant."

"It shows extraordinary stolidity to be entirely unaffected by brilliance."

"Sarah regards superior intelligence as a snare of the devil."

The Duke and Cynthia certainly were in a position to congratulate each other. Both were, in their own sphere, powerful. Cynthia's word was law. No one would have questioned a decision given by her on a social matter. Her approval set the seal on any career. This is a peculiar power reserved for some people, and it was precisely the knowledge that she possessed it that brought the Duke to her the morning after his

interview with Alaric. Cynthia was the only person who could help him, and he was probably going to ask more of her than anybody had ever done.

She was of course aware of the Duke's connection with Jenny. Indeed, one day when they were alone she had said quite frankly: "We went to the Oddities last night. People are quite right. That little friend of yours is fascinating, and extraordinarily unstagey."

"That's very nice of you. I will tell her you admire her. She will value it."

In answer to his note asking her to keep him the luncheon-hour if possible, as he wished to talk to her quite alone, and on a very important matter, she had replied that she would be at home to lunch and out to the rest of the world.

It was a piece of good fortune that she was in town, and the Duke walked round to Berkeley Square more excited than he had felt for years. He was courting a snub, and if not a snub, for perhaps such a word could not apply to any transaction between himself and Cynthia, at any rate a refusal, a refusal which would no doubt be given in such a way as to rob it of all offence, but still a refusal.

"A blessed peace is over everything," she said. "I believe mine are the only blinds up in the square."

"I was surprised to hear you were in town."

"Only passing through. I go to Scotland the day after to-morrow. Harry's got himself into a scrape——" Harry was her youngest, still at Oxford.

The Duke looked interested.

"Can I help?"

"Oh no, thanks—I'm quite equal to tackling the Israelites, and I'm Scotch enough to get all the abatement possible. There is one good point about Isaac and Co.; they have the good manners of the East, and know when to give way with courtesy. I don't want his father to know. Ronald attaches too much importance to that sort of thing. You might speak a word in season to Harry, though."

They talked gaily through lunch, finding each other as always the best of company. When they were alone the Duke leaned forward and said with the lightness of touch which he declared was the only excuse for saying anything serious:

"Cynthia, I am going to astonish you."

"You can't."

"We shall see. You once told me that you admired Jenny Oldcastle."

"The little lady at the Oddities?"

"She has left the Oddities. She has left the stage."

"That is not astonishing. She seemed to me to suggest a different career."

"A better one?"

"I don't say that. Who knows what is better or best? Is she going to be married?"

"I am not quite sure. Someone of a considerable social position is going to ask her to marry him."

Cynthia did not for one moment suspect the truth. Her uncle had always seemed so entirely made of dignity, that anything which invited ridicule did not seem possible in connection with him.

"Is she asking advice? Am I asked to enter into the matter?"

"That is so. Some time ago I constituted myself her guardian and gave her Glamoy's Lodge to live in."

Of course Cynthia knew this, but it had always been obviously discreet and good manners to ignore the fact.

Then he told her all about Jenny and all about himself. He had a wonderful gift of story-telling, and he made it appear a fascinating romance. Unlike most men of his position, he had enjoyed life because he had always considered it as important to amuse other people as to be amused himself.

She received a real shock when he revealed the fact that he intended to marry Jenny if she would have him.

She did not, as some women would have done, make the irritating remark: "You are not serious." She said instead interrogatively:

"You are serious?"

"Quite. If you knew her you would not think the idea so monstrous."

He had given her the word she was looking for.

"There will be a howl."

He assented and added:

"A terrible howl!"

She knew him well enough to say:

"There might be an heir."

"You mistake. I intend to make her my duchess. I shall not bore her by making her my wife."

There was a silence. She knew that he would not have come to such a decision without having thought it out.

"Is that fair?" and she laid a hand lightly on his arm before she added humorously: "You may live till you are a hundred."

"I am told that is impossible. Sir Benjamin tells me that my life is not nearly as good as it looks."

This startled her. The social firmament without him would be empty indeed, and yet it is generally with this suddenness that such lords of the forest as he fall.

She was tempted to say something banal and conventional, but forbore.

"Have you heard what Exmoor said the other day when they told him he had only a few hours to live?—'Thank God, it's all over.' At eighteen such a phrase sounds horrible; at seventy-six the possibility of saying it is nature's narcotic."

"Exmoor was dull."

"True. The public respected him because he had the manners of a boor and the statesmanship of a vestryman. Do you know," he said, breaking off suddenly, "why the Whigs held the ear of the public so long?"

"I dimly feel the reason, but I can't put it into words."

"Because there is nothing the English people respect so much as the capacity to lay hold of other people's property."

Cynthia knew that in diverting the conversation he was giving her a chance to assimilate what he had told her. She was too much his pupil for her face to display agitation—which she certainly felt. It was the most bewildering announcement which had ever been made her.

He was leaving it to her to resume the subject, and she did so at once.

"You want me to help?"

"Yes, I want you to do something which will show everyone that you are satisfied."

"I do not ask you, for I am sure you are convinced in your own mind that everything is quite right."

He knew what she meant by "everything," and made a formal inclination of his head.

"I was sure of it. You know I'm not *exigeante*, but I must play the game. I've only one black mark against me and that was that little American girl with the charming manners who said her fortune had been left her by her father. It turned out to have come to her from an old railway financier who died in her flat, you remember."

"I saw her at the coronation."

"Yes, she was sent sandwiches from the royal supply. We were all taken in."

"She'll marry one of us yet; so much brain and money will not be wasted," laughed Glamoy. "And when she does we shall all say the story of the railway promoter was a wicked invention."

"It was Lady Grimsby's fault. She persuaded me." Then Cynthia resumed: "It will be a fight, you know. I can't do it alone. There is always the point of her going to Court. Impossible, I'm afraid."

"For a few years, yes. But democracy is moving fast and in this country the throne never quarrels with facts, or the people."

"In making her a duchess, you are placing a great strain upon her."

"She is one of those rare women who would come naturally to a throne."

Cynthia looked at him with a hardly perceptible raising of the eyebrows, and the Duke thought he caught a touch of amusement in her eyes.

"I don't mind your laughing at me, because I am right."

"I will take your word ; but will she be happy ? "

"Jenny will always be happy if she thinks she is rising. She will take the position of a duchess as literally and seriously as an evangelical takes the Bible."

"Do you think it is necessarily a promotion to become a duchess ? "

The Duke laughed.

"You shall not pursue me too far."

"Your mind is made up ? "

"Quite."

"Would you like me to call on her ? "

The Duke rose, his face illuminated. "Cynthia, when have you ever failed to be noble ? "

"I will call to-morrow. Do you know," she went on, "I have heard people hint that she is your daughter ? "

"Excellent ! Let 'em continue to think so till she has reaped the advantage of it."

CHAPTER XXIII

GLAMOYS drove to Kingston and arrived in time for Jenny to give him tea.

Jenny had debated with herself whether she should worry him by telling him of Lady Sarah's visit. Her first feeling had been to say nothing about it. The memory was too humiliating. At the same time it would not have been treating him fairly to keep him in ignorance. She therefore told him the whole story. The poise of Glamoys' head grew a shade statelier and the expression of pride deepened about his lips.

"I must indeed be getting old, Jenny, when it is imagined that I can be tracked like a wayward boy. I owe you a great reparation. I should have left you to enjoy your triumph in your own way."

"Daddy, I don't want to go back to the stage. I would rather not."

"You shall not go back, Jenny. That is already settled. But all the same it is my fault."

"It is not your fault. The world has such a horrid mind."

"You see, Jenny, Sarah is a dear soul, but she

is a missionary, and missionaries are in search of evil. I have a theory that what is wanted is a missionary society to find out all the good in the world, and to rejoice over it when it is found. Never mind, it shall be made up to you. I have an idea. We will teach them all a lesson."

He took both her hands and pressed them, as if to give her courage. "Jenny, be proud!"

"I am going to be. I will never forgive him."

"Oh, him! We have forgotten him."

Jenny gave a brave little nod of assent.

"Jenny." He looked at her gravely. "You mustn't laugh, and you mustn't have hysterics at what I am going to say to you. I don't think you will have hysterics, because you are not the hysterical kind."

She looked at him in wonder. He was serious, but there was a twinkle at the back of his eyes.

"Jenny, if you like, I will make you a duchess."

Jenny's eyes grew wider.

"If you were the sort of woman people think you are, that wouldn't amount to much, but you are—what you are, and given time you will be a great lady. You will have a fight. You will have some uncomfortable times, but I have already found you allies."

He paused and her eyes grew wider still—perhaps with a sort of terror. He loosed her hands as if figuratively withdrawing all compulsion and said with some ceremony: "Jenny, I ask you to become my duchess."

There was silence—only a steadfast glance.

"Then people shall see whether you are to be

treated with contempt and disbelief. I will show them that I, who know you, think you fit to take any position."

The Duke was perhaps himself astonished at his enthusiasm. Jenny shrank back.

"Jenny, don't play the coward. It's the only possible way we can show this young man the mistake he has made."

Still Jenny stood looking at him with wide-open eyes.

"Will you let him think that I hold you merely as a toy, as a plaything?"

"That is what he does think, doesn't he?"

"I am afraid he does—and after all, I owe Sarah one tremendous answer to all her interrogatories about my life."

Jenny wanted to say no. She felt that she ought to say no, that in saying yes she would be taking advantage of an old man's fondness. The offer, however, discovered the weak point in her armour—ambition; for she was conscious of her power to achieve the social miracle.

"Perhaps the day will be when he will come to you on his knees. Think of the triumph over him—over them all. Jenny, I ask you to be my wife." He paused, and then added quite gently:

"We will be just the same friends as we have been, no more—you understand? but you shall be Duchess of Glamoyes."

He held out his hand and she put hers in his. He told her of Cynthia's contemplated visit. It was typical of Jenny's nature that whatever she may have felt inwardly she was not outwardly agitated.

"Emma must see her, of course."

"Yes. I have told her all about Emma. I shall be obliged if she will meet Mrs. Stewart."

They sat and talked of the event quite sensibly. They were both aware of the cry of derision that the announcement would bring forth, of the running up and down and backwards and forwards, of the tremendous meal of gossip and scandal which they were serving up to a nation. No doubt the world would talk of second childhood. The Duke pointed this out with humour. "But there," he said, "we are not even original, for in the papers last week I saw the announcement of a marriage between a man of ninety and a girl of twenty."

"Duke," asked Jenny gravely, "what is your explanation of it all?"

"Of all what?"

"Of us? You see, it is all so different from anything else."

"All things have their explanation in necessity, Jenny. What we are doing is necessary, depend upon it. You must be placed. Everything demands it, and I am far too old to play tricks with time."

Jenny's acceptance of the Duke was not all selfish. Her intuition had worked with characteristic rapidity during the few remarks which had passed. Glamoy had done for her what nobody else would, or could have done. He had taken the little gutter-singer seriously. He had taken her at her own valuation. A wonderful wave of gratitude passed over her and the opportunity of showing it was hers. She felt that it would be a delight to him to have her as his wife, and she felt strong enough to kill ridicule with dignity and conduct.

Of course the position was abnormal. What did that matter? Her career had been abnormal, and she must have the courage of it. In the midst of it would be the support of Cynthia, and that was a tremendous alliance.

"Shall I tell Emma or will you?" he asked.

Jenny thought.

"I will tell her."

She did not say what was in her mind on the matter, that Emma's attitude on the subject of Alaric mystified her. Jenny had gathered the impression that Emma felt she might have managed Alaric better.

After the Duke had returned to town Jenny went in search of Emma.

She told her the news quietly, and made no attempt to explain why she appeared so soon to have forgotten Alaric. Emma would, of course, know that she had not forgotten him. Perhaps she would guess the two factors which had induced her to take such a line of conduct.

Emma was engaged on her eternal task of fine needlework. She listened in silence, but her hands trembled, and she had finally to abandon the pretence of working.

"You have made up your mind very quickly," she said. Her heart was aching for Alaric.

"It was the only thing to do." She was brave enough, but the presence of Emma, and the feeling that her good friend was agitated almost beyond words, nearly unnerved her.

"Mrs. Stewart is coming to see me to-morrow. She has promised to help us."

Emma looked at her in real amazement. It

was the greatest tribute to the Duke's influence she had yet had—Mrs. Stewart, the great lady and great beauty, whose fascination and social charm were a household word. With the exception of the incident of Alaric the meteoric career of this fledgling of the slums seemed likely to continue. That Jenny had forgotten Alaric she did not, of course, for one moment believe. She knew that this attempt on Jenny's part to close the wound would only open it the wider.

There was silence between them. Emma wanted to speak of Alaric, but could not trust herself to do so. Then in a moment Jenny was in her arms, sobbing as if her heart would break. Emma held her close, and waited till the storm was spent.

"I shall be all right in a day or two," Jenny gasped, struggling to control herself. "It's just—it's just——" and she wept again.

"Oh, my dear, what have you done?" said Emma brokenly.

But Jenny would not have comfort of this kind, and fled to her room. To mingle her regrets with another seemed like disloyalty to Glamoy's, and the great thing was to be loyal to him to the end. It would be infamous to be otherwise.

She descended to dinner in a mood of exotic gaiety.

"You will see Mrs. Stewart, won't you, Emma?"

Emma looked startled.

"Oh, there is no need." She went on hurriedly: "I have been thinking, Jenny, that now you ought to have someone else with you. Don't interrupt, but listen. It may be somewhat difficult to find the right person. She must, of course

be unexceptionable—absolutely. Mrs. Stewart will find the person. Perhaps she will take you to her house. She is the sort of woman who will do things splendidly if she undertakes to do them at all. At any rate, I am sure I shall be out of place. You can say I am ill.”

Jenny had gone white. She rose with startled eyes and came to Emma.

“Emma, you don’t think it all quite dreadful? You’re not going to desert me? If you do, something awful will happen to me.”

“Desert you, of course not! But just for the moment——”

“No, not for a minute. If you go from here I shall go with you.”

As she stood before her, every feature of her face imperious with resolve, Emma could not help thinking how admirably she would become the station which had been offered her.

Emma’s objection to meeting Mrs. Stewart was made up of the fear that this lady, who had known her slightly in her youth, might recognize her, and the dislike to taking part in what seemed a conspiracy to wound Alaric. She could not stand up against Jenny’s determination, however. There was nothing to do but to take the risks. Perhaps Mrs. Stewart would ask Jenny to come to her. That would put matters quite right and enable her to withdraw. A parting from Jenny would cause her acute pain, but under the circumstances it was perhaps inevitable.

“I intend you to be with me always. Oh, Emma, how could it be otherwise? Do you think I am such an unnatural friend?”

Emma felt that she would be obliged to confess her reason for not desiring to meet Mrs. Stewart or to accept the situation. She was in a dilemma. Was it fair under the circumstances to allow the Duke to introduce her to Mrs. Stewart without being aware of her identity? Should Mrs. Stewart recognize her, it might rouse in her mind the same suspicions as had troubled Miss Burne.

The situation was full of perplexity, and having passed a sleepless night revolving the possibilities, she wired to Father Hawthorne and asked him to come and see her.

He came down in the middle of the morning. He had known the whole circumstances of the Duke's protection of Jenny, and knew Emma well enough to be absolutely confident that what she said about the situation was true.

He was, as usual, perfectly clear-headed. "You cannot leave Jenny. That is out of the question. I have met Mrs. Stewart. If she should recognize you, send her to me. I think I could put matters right."

She told him all about Alaric.

A look of extraordinary sympathy came into his face. The tragedy of the situation was unusual even in his experience.

"You think your boy still loves her?"

"I am sure of it."

"Then if you really desire their marriage, if you think it will be for their good, why not send for him and disclose yourself? You are the only person who is likely to impress him with the truth of the facts."

"Nothing can be done now; Jenny will never

take back her word. Besides, the situation is complicated, as things always are, by sub-forces. She has a deep affection for the Duke apart from that which she owes him as gratitude, and apart from the fascination he exercises as friend."

"I don't quite understand."

"I am afraid I don't quite, either, but it is there. Her youth cries out for Alaric; something old and experienced in Jenny, an intuition and wisdom which she possesses Heaven knows how, are more of a mate for the Duke's soul."

"That sounds very occult."

"It is an occult problem, but it is present."

"If you think she will keep her word, need you interfere? He will get over it."

"We get over everything, don't we?—in a way."

"Yes; we hardly like to admit, any of us, what we finally come to accept as truth, that all our sorrows are merely educative. That we are being fashioned by the Divine Craftsman in His own relentless way."

"Tell me, as a churchman, as a priest, how does the marriage of a girl barely nineteen with a man of seventy-six strike you?"

"It ought to be horrible, but it isn't."

"You are to be asked to marry them."

"With pleasure."

"And the Duke's life?"

"We are here to save the sinner; besides, I have no mortal right to refuse to marry them. They are both free."

"I have a feeling——" She stopped.

"Go on."

“ A feeling that it will not be.”

“ Well, if it should be, it will be all for the best, be sure of that. By the way, thank Jenny for that noble contribution to the school-treats. Tell her I only used half and am keeping the other half for next year. There is nothing so fatal as overdoing that sort of thing. She ought to know that.”

“ She is so anxious to share some of her good fortune with others.”

He went away after having confirmed Emma in the line of conduct she wanted to take. Of course she could not leave Jenny.

CHAPTER XXIV

AS for Jenny, the thing being done, she had her periods of agony when she thought of Alaric, moods which she kept strictly to herself but which Emma instinctively sensed. She was too single-minded to dream for one moment of not trying to forget him. At nineteen, however, it is not easy to forget the first great magnet. There remains a physical ache which will not be dulled. Emma dimly realized that there was something subtle underlying Jenny's feelings. The Duke, who would be in the eyes of the world an old rake rendering himself ridiculous in his second childhood, made an appeal to Jenny which she could hardly explain, and which few would have been able to understand. She loved two men : that was the truth, a truth which, combined with her peculiar position, would simply have convinced people, had they known it, that she was what they wished to believe her.

Men, when they feel themselves morally exceptional, glory in it as a sign of genius ; they tread the path of eccentric ethics with self-satisfaction. A woman knows that such frankness is not for her,

that it will be considered no sign of genius, but the evidence of a diseased moral conscience. The absence of any display of dual affection is what constitutes one of her mysteries in the eyes of men. They feel there is something being kept back, but they are unable to say what it is.

In some ways Jenny loved the Duke more than she did Alaric, but Alaric was her necessity. He was the sex antagonist with whom, in the name of love, she must step out into the arena and do battle—hating and worshipping. Love is, after all, a combination of attraction and repulsion—the one feeding the other.

The Duke thought that Alaric would soon be forgotten. He deemed that so far he understood Jenny. He tested her solely by the qualities he admired in her—her dignity, moral and mental, and her capacity to soar. These were the gifts in her which were to him apparent, outstanding, the arms emblazoned on her banner. The essential passional side he of all men should have considered, but he did not—at any rate, not sufficiently. She was enough mistress of herself to seem compensated, and he was pleased.

The visit of Cynthia Stewart was a great success, and the Duke was gratified that Cynthia, that perfect judge, deemed her social possibilities of the highest kind.

“You are right,” she decided. “Just as some people are born with the genius of the pen or the stage, she is born with the genius of class. It is, of course, rarer than artistic genius. She cannot make a mistake, because, if she does, her natural breed is such that it ceases to be a mistake. The

breath of an angel must have blown her into your care."

Jenny had felt nigh unto death with nervousness, but there had been no sign of it. The curious, low, musical lilt of her voice, so different from the up-and-down vagaries of suburbanism, yet away from the flat-lipped, toneless sounds of English gentlefolk, fascinated Cynthia. At first she wondered if it were measured out like a wine—a self-conscious effort; then she ceased to care if it were so, considering how sure and unerring was its effect.

"She receives already," said Cynthia. "She can receive, and do it without offence. What a pity she ever went on the stage. It will always be remembered. Straight from the gutter can be arranged, but via the stage is like calling at a public-house on the way to a drawing-room. It ought to be just the opposite, but somehow it isn't."

"There is a great deal of nonsense talked about the stage in our days. It is a very good profession for gypsies," said the Duke, "and I like gypsies."

"Still, the taint of the stage remains," said Cynthia a little sadly. "It is a terrible disadvantage not to have been to Court—especially if you are a duchess."

"Jenny realizes that she will have great difficulties, but, then, if one seeks adventures one must take risks."

Jenny had talked to Cynthia quite naturally, had received her in exactly the right frock, and had admitted the graciousness of Cynthia's act. She

thanked her for it with an absolute lack of the fulsome. Her social ear seemed perfect, and she never went out of the key.

Emma had been in the room when Cynthia arrived and had stayed for a while. After a time she rose and left them, with the obvious idea that they would like to be alone. Cynthia seemed to remember her face, tried to place it for a few seconds, and then gave up the attempt. It was not very important. She saw at once by whom the feminine side of Jenny's poise had been developed, and reflected that she was a lucky girl to have had two such mentors.

Cynthia would not have been a woman had she not been alert for evidences of Jenny's happiness or unhappiness. The Duke had told her about Alaric. He would not have deemed it fair to keep her in ignorance. The result of her observations was that Alaric was not entirely forgotten, even if Jenny honestly believed that she had put him quite out of her mind.

"You will come and lunch with me to-morrow, I hope," she said as she rose to go. "I leave for Scotland in the evening, but I shall be back in a week or ten days."

She did not tell Jenny that she had revolutionized her plans in order to keep her word to Glamoy's.

"It's all very extraordinary, and quite unreal—but ridiculously possible," she said, as she drove away from Glamoy's Lodge. "I suppose the poor child is in for an awful fight—but she will win."

She found the Duke waiting for her, and

the conversation as above described took place.

"You see, she is not the sort of person who would derive the least pleasure from planting her coronet among second-rate people. You were right, she is out for the best, and hasn't the least snobbishness about it. It's all very curious. She's coming to lunch to-morrow."

The Duke's eyes shone with gratitude.

"If she's all she seems to be, I can only regret that my poor, deluded eldest boy didn't marry her, instead of Betty Montgomery, who is the daughter of a hundred Earls, and looks like the daughter of a hundred cooks—and not good cooks at that—and has the brains of a tadpole."

"The metaphors are not convincing—you should say a cook with the brains of a ruined *entrée*."

Jenny was of course pleased to hear that Cynthia approved of her. She on her side very much approved of Cynthia, far more than her pride would allow her to say. She was everything Jenny admired and thought desirable. She was beautiful even now; she was gentle, beautifully dressed, quite feminine, and behind it all there was power and the assurance of race. Jenny knew she had that assurance also, and wondered where she got it from; she used to laugh at herself when she reflected on her possession of it, but she never doubted its possession.

She arrived in Berkeley Square in the quiet brougham which the Duke had bought for her to go to the theatre in.

She had asked Glamoy's if she should use it, and he had answered :

"Of course. Why not? It is of no use to apologize at this time of day."

So Jenny for the first time put foot in the mansions of the elect. It pleased her. The quiet stone-work and marbles of the hall, the solid, antique sconces for candles, and the air of restraint, produced a general effect of repose in riches. True, she had of late lived in equal luxury, but this was the first time she had been in the right house with the right people, and it struck her as strange.

In the house in Berkeley Square everything superfluous seemed to have been eliminated, and except in Cynthia's sitting-room, looking out on a small roof-garden entirely shut off from observation, there was a lack of the smaller household gods. The dining-room had one picture, a magnificent Vandyck, over the mantelpiece.

Cynthia observed Jenny narrowly without appearing to do so.

"She is marvellous, quite marvellous," she reflected.

A leading paper had already hinted at the news.

A scream arose on all sides. To the outside world it appeared the most unnatural thing—the triumph of a designing minx, nothing less. She would soon be a dowager duchess, with, no doubt, a huge jointure. It was not likely that the Duke had much private fortune to leave, after such a life. In this they made the superficial mistake of mobs—they did not know how good a business man the Duke had been.

Rumour, until this announcement, had had it that Jenny was his daughter. Indeed, many had been ready to point out the mother. Poor Miss Parry, who had known the duke for twenty years, was obviously the missing parent.

The storm which arose in more intimate circles was far more vehement. The Duke was connected with half the noble families in the kingdom, and they felt that it was a stab from one of their own order. The very strength of the Duke's position in this matter became his weakness. His close connection with the Court, the half-dozen duchesses, and dozen or so marchionesses and scores of countesses with whom he was allied, made the whole thing impossible on any basis.

The Duke, aware of the storm, was impervious to it.

"They do not know her," he said to Cynthia, like any boy of twenty, at the same time apologizing for having drawn her to his side.

Cynthia agreed that a knowledge of Jenny would make the situation more possible, whilst privately wondering how the introductions necessary and preliminary to an understanding of her were to be managed. There must be a nucleus formed on whom Jenny could depend, and how was it to be done? Had it been a baronet or one of the minor peerage the comparisons would not have been quite so grotesque. Dukes stood out undeniably; they were on pedestals. The creature who elected to share the pedestal must be under the pressure of a tremendous gaze.

Still, the thing was to be, and in her short visit

to Scotland, Cynthia, under the penalty of being suspected of insanity, announced her adherence.

On her descended a snowstorm of epistles and a shower of visits. The letters were of every variety of feminine clericalism, from the plain white note with its small gilt coronet for seal, guiltless of perfume, to the over-scented and coloured confection suggestive of an early Victorian valentine.

All asked for information from her—the one person of real influence with the Duke. Of course it was not true. Why did he not deny it? Even the rumour, however, was terrible, and likely to do immense harm. The Duke, wrote one great lady with considerable wit, had lived a life of folly without doing anything foolish. As a matter of fact, she would have been more in the right to say that he had always admitted folly to his society as a charming acquaintance, but had never treated him as an intimate, or even as an equal.

Lady Sarah, hearing Cynthia was in town, posted up from Surrey and descended on her whilst she was still at breakfast. Lady Sarah was sincerely and terribly shocked. The news that her eldest boy had been killed in the hunting-field could not have affected her more. The whole thing was redolent of hell-fire and damnation; it was sulphurous and stank in the nostrils.

“But you’ve seen her, haven’t you?” asked Cynthia innocently.

“Yes; Henry and I called on her.”

“Well, her appearance and manner must be some consolation.”

"I thought her looks atrocious. She reminds one of Vivien, in 'The Idylls of the King.'"

"Never saw the lady," drawled Cynthia in a deep contralto. Sarah Brent always had the effect of bringing out the worst in her. "Great beauty is of course a form of over-emphasis, and over-emphasis is always a little startling, isn't it?"

"I mean," said Lady Sarah, with real tears in her eyes, "that I think it is shameful, and it ought to be stopped. If she were not what she is, if she were in every other way desirable, the difference in age would make my father ridiculous. As it is——" Lady Sarah turned away to the window and bit her lips. Cynthia was sorry for her; the grief was very real. Poor Lady Sarah had played off her own conception of the day of judgment against other phenomena all her life, and the result was that many things which were mere annoyances she conceived to be mortal sins. Her father morally pirouetting on the edge of the grave with a Bacchante was a terrible spectacle.

"I see your point," said Cynthia.

"Is there any other?" asked Sarah sharply.

"Yes, but it would be waste of time for me to try and put it. I am afraid we should never agree."

Sarah turned and looked at her in amazement.

"Do you actually mean that you approve of this extraordinary and outrageous marriage?"

"No, I don't. It is obviously one of those things which a family would rather had not happened, but why make the worst of it? I distinctly assert that the girl is presentable. That is all I say."

"What is the good of a girl being presentable if she can't be presented?"

Cynthia looked at Sarah in alarm. A glance, however, reassured her—no joke was intended. A joke from Sarah would have been a dangerous symptom.

"We both know your father, Sarah, so where's the use of arguing. I am only too glad to find that the belated duchess is a person one can ask to one's house and introduce to one's friends."

"You will surely not force her on Society?"

"I shall not force her on anybody. It will not be necessary. She will prove the exception in the case where burlesque actresses marry into the great families. She will be accepted everywhere. I shall do all I can to make the exception good. It is only fair."

The contest was unequal. Cynthia was a power in Society; Lady Sarah, although a duke's daughter, was a nobody. Very Low Church, like immorality, has a knack of making people *déclassé*.

Lady Sarah took her leave, her nostrils quivering as if inhaling anticipatory whiffs of the fire and brimstone which must inevitably overtake such wickedness. As if to drive her beyond control, Jenny's exquisite equipage drew up as she descended the steps.

For a moment she was tempted to ignore her completely. Then she remembered that at least six servants were agog to see what would happen, and her breeding conquered. She made a slight bow, and her temper was not improved by the dignified inclination of the beautiful little head,

and the indefinite smile which accompanied it. It was distressing, but there was absolutely nothing to take exception to.

Lady Sarah's onslaught was not by any means most to be feared. She neither moved amongst those of the *haute volée* nor had she any power therein. There were others who were annoyed at Cynthia's attitude. From Eaton Square to Hereford Gardens there was a running to and fro.

Some even declared that the law was potent, but were quite unable to describe the process it should take. The displeasure of the sovereign had reached the Duke in the shape of an equerry—at least, so rumour had it. The Duke ought to have remembered that he had the Garter. He ought to have remembered the family of his first wife.

"Perhaps he did," murmured a wag.

"She is only nineteen. She may live till she's ninety."

"Why not a hundred?"

"Eighty years of jointure."

"Too heartbreaking to contemplate."

"Cynthia is stretching her authority far."

"Glamoy is her uncle, but she has always been in love with him."

"What a dreadful thing to say!"

"Not at all; on the Continent uncles and nieces marry, especially in Royal families."

"And aunts and nephews?"

"There is not, as a rule, the same attraction."

"No, of course not—women don't propose."

"Will they live in St. James's Square?"

"Her mother was a washerwoman."

"A charwoman."

"Same thing."

"No."

"Which takes precedence of the other?"

"I think a washerwoman goes in to dinner before a charwoman, doesn't she?"

"Cynthia will succeed in her attempt."

"Cynthia says there is no need to help her—that Miss Oldcastle is a social genius, and that just as a person with a genius for music comes to the front at once, so a genius for Society lands people in the front rank."

"A delightful point of view," murmured Colonel Coveney.

"I believe," said Lady Branksome thoughtfully, "that Cynthia is saying that to cover the advance of her *protégée*——"

"She is so clever."

"Reggie"—Mrs. Tudor-More was alluding to her boy in the Firsts—"says she is absolutely respectable, and has astounding good manners. He goes to the Oddities a great deal, and she has snubbed him three times."

"He admits it? What a nice boy!"

"Reggie is a nice boy. He speaks of her with great respect."

"Then she has Reggie on her side," laughed Lady Branksome.

"I suppose she told him to 'go along!'"

"My dear, actresses on the burlesque stage are not housemaids."

"I sent for all the photographs in existence of her directly I heard the news," said the Comtesse de Grandterre, an Englishwoman who had married

a French nobleman who was half a Scotchman, "and I am bound to say the girl has distinction. In France the whole thing would be impossible, and ridiculous. In our respectable England it is within the limits. A country of paradoxes ! "

"The thing that surprises me most is that Glamoy should do anything approaching the undignified. Whatever his actions he has always behaved *en grand seigneur*. He has towered above the petty throng, frankly pagan, but constitutional. It is an unstatesmanlike marriage, that is its chief fault."

"What is the use of talking ? " said a great lady sharply, who was first-cousin to the Duke. "It is the act of an old man in his dotage, and it ought to be stopped. Sarah ought to shut him up."

The press munched the morsel unctuously, extracting every atom of flavour from it.

The Duke had not intended that the news should become public property until the event had taken place, and was considerably annoyed at the discussion ; but he had lived too much in the public view to feel it in the way more private people might have done.

"The public regard us," he had been used to say, "as a pageant for which they have paid to see. They expect us to have women they may admire, morals they can find fault with, and luxuries they can envy. In their hearts they deem the middle-class members of the nobility to be grossly abusing their trust and opportunities. They look to us to give colour to the national existence, and to carry out with consummate ease

political works of transcendent national importance."

This in reality summed up his creed—to be splendid, pagan, and patriotic in the bigger sense of the word.

It was quite true that the sovereign had expressed dissatisfaction with the news, and that the Duke, with a superb gesture of deference at the foot of the throne, had intimated that he considered it a point on which he could not accept suggestions.

The more he thought over the matter the less did he see why he should not act as he was doing. While reflecting on it one afternoon in his library in St. James's Square a strange sensation overcame him; he seemed to be swinging in mid-air, he even appeared to lose consciousness. When he came to he was still alone, and he sat looking at the flowers in the small Italian garden with a strange sense of numbness and lassitude. "A little more of this sort of thing at my age, and the comedy will end with one of those sudden curtains which are so effective."

There was a little more of it the next morning, but not so much as the day before. He was alarmed, not for himself but for Jenny. Nevertheless, he forbore to call in Sir Benjamin. He had the secret terror of compulsion which haunts old age, the nervous fear of the time when its weakness may be an excuse for others to intrude. Although this was the less probable in the case of an individuality as powerful as his, the instinct to prevent it was there.

Sir Benjamin would probably say, "No

excitement, absolute rest. The wedding must be postponed."

The Duke was determined to keep his word, to make Jenny a duchess in face of any opposition which might arise.

CHAPTER XXV

ALARIC heard the rumours with a sickening of the soul and a sense of horror. At the back of his mind he knew he had been wrong. He had brought about the catastrophe. She was doing it to revenge herself upon him. The lover is the eternal egotist, and in his eyes all Jenny's actions could only be the result of her feelings for him.

He did not believe the blow would really fall. It could not. There was not such cruelty in the world. At the same time he was in a state of absolute bewilderment as to what was to be done.

He and his aunt had not discussed the subject. Silently she had done all she could to show her sympathy. It was impossible, however, thinking what she did of Jenny—for she was utterly sceptical as to her morals—to have the matter out for frank analysis, even if the raw state of Alaric's feelings on the subject would have permitted it. She grieved in silence for the wound, which she now realized was deeper than she had imagined.

He wrote endless letters which he never posted,

letters which he thought masterpieces of satire. He wished her happiness. With splendid irony he congratulated her on the fact that the gilded bondage which was ultimately to pay for a life of freedom and wealth would not last long. Perhaps knowing that his natural good feeling would prevent the letters being posted, he allowed himself to write brutalities which worked off his rage, but which he would never have permitted anyone to read.

One fact emerged from the chaos of feeling. He could not remain where he was. Movement always gives us the consolation of a sense of effective action, especially when we are young.

He knew that there was only one course, which was to go to Jenny and ask her to be his wife. He was—in his heated lover's mind—quite sure that she would find some way of evading her obligations when she found him at her feet.

He was less rigorous than Jenny. He was mainly romantic, whatever life might make of him afterwards. In his eyes the lover's cause was above law. Still he delayed—wandering from morn till eve in fair and foul weather, a distraught and unhappy being, into the heart of the countryside, or along the shore, where the surge of the waves, and the towering crags of the cliffs seen through driving mist, were in accord with his misery.

He would sit for hours in the little amphitheatre of rocks where they had picnicked, perhaps with some weird hope that she might suddenly realize what she was doing, break away, and

come straight to this shore where they had been happy and find him.

Miss Burne had seen the news in the London papers with a great feeling of relief. She had had her romance and had lost her betrothed at Inker-mann, and though she had undoubtedly loved the man, her life had somehow missed the mad bewilderment of a great infatuation. The tragedy of the event had given its temperament a fictitious value both in her eyes and in the eyes of her friends. She had grieved deeply, but she had not undergone the agony which a shattered romance brings to a nature like Alaric's, half in love with its exquisite misery.

She was of opinion that Alaric would, once the event was irrevocable, make a quick recovery.

His altered appearance shocked her, it is true; but she put it down rather to a constitutional sensitiveness to attacks from without. She was quite sure that, Jenny definitely out of his reach, all would be well. This was what she wanted to think.

She ran her recollection over all the nice, eligible girls she knew, preferably those with money. There was an heiress to nearly half a million connected with the Burnes. She had already looked kindly on Alaric. She was three years older, but that was a good thing. Her estates ran alongside his. Nothing could be better. In the society of nicely-brought-up English girls he would soon see that he had been dazzled by a beauty which was too marked to be respectable. Then there was the daughter of the kind lady who had shown a belated officiousness in warning

her about Jenny. She also was very rich in her own right. There were plenty of nice girls, and it must be her business to surround him with them.

Every day she eagerly searched the paper to see if the irrevocable had taken place. In the meantime she had written to the heiress's mother, imploring her to bring aid to her distracted nephew in the shape of her own and her daughter's company.

"So many young men pass through this sort of attachment. Now and then one of our belongings is caught, but as a rule it is easy to temporize till the fever is past. Alaric is different, however. He has not been to a public school. He is more unspoilt in the affections than the young men of his age. I shall not therefore feel happy till this Vivien has captured her social Merlin. It is extraordinary the way some of the papers write of her. As if she were a person one might *expect* to become a duchess. What ought to be the most grotesque thing in the world seems as if it would finally be taken almost seriously in some quarters. Do come to us and bring Helena. You once said such an event would please. I hope you will not let a natural feeling of pride stand in the way of the saving of Alaric."

The letter had hardly been written when Alaric, to Miss Burne's despair, disappeared.

He could endure it no longer. He must see her again. What he should do when he did see her he did not know.

He went straight to the house at Kingston and sent in his card.

The servant returned with the message that

Miss Oldcastle was not at home. Alaric's tenderness changed, and he shook from head to foot with rage. He was in a mood to behave quite badly, to dash through the house till he found her, and—to do what? That was the point. He did not know. He was about to follow the man, humiliated beyond words, when Emma Goodchild stood in his way. She dismissed the servant with a gesture and closed the door.

Alaric was soothed and comforted by the sympathy in her eyes.

"Why won't she see me? Mrs. Goodchild——"

His pride was broken. It was the pleading of a child.

Emma laid her hand almost caressingly on his arm.

"Where are you staying?"

"Morton's Hotel—St. James's."

"Shall you be in this evening?"

"Yes."

"I'll come to you. I have something to say."

She held out her hand and he went away feeling comforted. Strange he had not thought of Mrs. Goodchild. Perhaps it was because she had always seemed so detached.

It had cost Jenny something to send out the curt message of dismissal, but it was done almost without hesitation, because she felt at once it was the only fair thing to do, fair to the Duke, to Alaric, and herself.

Emma had heard her give the message, and when she rose and left the room Jenny knew that she had gone to Alaric. Emma's attitude had been so aloof, so non-committal, that Jenny

thought the action strange. Yet she did not resent it. She was glad that the blow should be softened, and yet not at her instigation. She would not even appear curious when Emma returned, but went on with some writing as if she did not suspect that Emma had seen Alaric.

Emma's fingers shook as she attempted to resume her needlework. Measuring her son's capacity for suffering by her own, she had pictured it to herself somewhat as it was. Yet the boy's face had startled her out of her armour of detachment and repose. After a while she rose and went to her room, locked herself in, and fell on her knees by the bed in an abject state of melancholy and grief.

She understood Jenny's character thoroughly, and she could estimate the exact part which ambition had played. She knew that it was the least of the three motives which had driven her on. Gratitude to the Duke and a desire to please him had chiefly influenced her. Injured pride was the third motive, but it was hardly as strong as the others.

It was because she could honestly desire the union of Alaric and Jenny that her sympathy with them both drove her into action.

She did not tell Jenny that she was going to town, but simply announced that she would not appear at dinner—the Duke was coming—and when the meal had begun she slipped out of the house.

Alaric was waiting for her impatiently. He had been trying to forecast ever since they parted what she could possibly have to say to him.

The wildest thoughts passed through his brain.

She was bringing a prayer from Jenny, imploring him to deliver her from the position in which she found herself. Perhaps behind all this there was some secret which he had not yet fathomed. What secret could there be? The day was past when wicked nobles could hold captive unwilling maidens. Besides, it was hardly a conspiracy, or it did not sound like one, to make a girl who was a nobody a duchess.

His constant endeavour to fit the Duke to the rôle of a melodramatic villain yielded no fruit, and he had not even succeeded in constructing a theory to feed his hate of the man when Emma was shown in.

The door was shut behind her, and, speechless with agitation, she took the chair Alaric put for her. In the light of the gas chandeliers she looked very pale and worn.

"Will you have a glass of wine or something? You look very tired."

"No, thank you."

The offer of wine made her give an involuntary shudder. With her past how could she reveal herself to this deserted son? That was the thing to be avoided if possible.

One thing she was sure she ought to do. She ought to put Jenny right with Alaric before this marriage took place.

"I want to know, Sir Alaric, why you came to see Jenny to-day?"

Alaric's expression of unhappiness deepened. He looked almost vacant for a moment or two, and then shook his head mournfully. He did not know. At any rate he had nothing definite to say.

“ You must have had some design,” urged Emma. “ You surely did not come merely to reproach her—to make her more unhappy ? ”

Alaric was still at a loss. Emma bent forward and said earnestly :

“ You judged her harshly, you did her a great injustice.”

“ It doesn’t matter now.”

“ If it mattered at all it matters now—surely. Things like that are not forgotten in a few weeks.”

“ Apparently they are,” said Alaric bitterly.

“ Can’t you guess why Jenny has done this thing ? ”

“ To gratify her vanity—the vanity which caused her to make a fool of me.”

“ It’s not brave of you to say that, and you know it isn’t true. It was wounded vanity—not altogether wounded vanity, but mostly that—which caused her to do this.”

“ I don’t understand.”

“ Jenny is proud, much prouder than you have any idea of. Her pride was the cause of her first telling you an untruth—she was afraid that you would not understand.”

“ How am I to know what to believe ? ”

“ Believe your own heart. If she had been worthless do you think she could have won your love ? You don’t know half her goodness.”

Emma was carried away by her subject. She forgot herself for the moment and her own situation. She was so intent, from the depth of her love for Jenny, on completely effacing this one mistake, that she pleaded with a passionate fervour which astonished Alaric,

"Think of it, Sir Alaric—a child brought up as she was, amid poverty, hunger and the rough atmosphere of a London slum. You may say that a wife with such an origin is not the wife for you. That may be true in a sense, but did you ever detect anything which offended, see anything which lowered your respect—except this one stupid untruth? Believe me, this instinct for choosing the best and the sweetest is not a thing which can be taught."

"You forget that all the time she was playing a part. What proof have I that she is not always acting?"

"Do you think that? In your heart of hearts you know it is not true. In believing the worst of Jenny you are false to your better self." Emma leaned forward, and speaking with great earnestness added: "I have known Jenny since she was a little child, and I will swear to you that she is as pure as snow, that she is a woman any man might be proud to make his wife. If I did not desire the happiness of both of you I should not say this."

"Why should my happiness concern you?"

Emma hurriedly evaded the issue.

"I desire Jenny's happiness because she gave me back so much of my own."

"I don't understand that."

"No, of course not." A fierce struggle was going on in her mind. Her impulse was to fling herself on her knees by her son's side and, kissing his hands, say: "I have come to comfort you. The white misery in your face makes me wretched as you are. I am the one person who

can answer for the goodness of the woman you love, and you must believe me because I am your mother."

Instead she said gently :

" You have no mother, Sir Alaric ? "

" No."

" Is she dead ? "

" I don't know. She left us when I was a baby."

There was a certain pathos in the word " us." Miss Burne had evidently not mentioned her harshly. She must have spoken of her leaving them all, and there was an indefinable touch of sympathy in this.

" Do you often think of her ? "

" I often wonder how she came to leave me."

It suddenly dawned on him that he was talking to a stranger about his mother. He had always been very sensitive and reserved on the subject since his aunt had told him that his mother had left him as a child. Why she had not loved him sufficiently to stay with him as other children's mothers did he had not been able to understand. As he grew up and read of such things he began to guess dimly the kind of tragedy which had occurred. Once he had asked his aunt suddenly :

" Do you know where my mother is ? "

" No, Alaric, I do not."

" Is she alive ? "

" We do not know."

She had looked him in the eyes frankly, evidently anxious that he should not think that she was keeping anything back.

Indeed, expecting him to question her further,

she braced herself to tell him the truth, although it must, in absolute fairness to the absent mother, involve some disclosures discreditable to the boy's father.

He had, however, remained silent. He had perhaps been afraid of destroying such ideals on the subject as he possessed.

Alaric felt no resentment at this stranger talking to him about his mother. The ugly hotel sitting-room seemed the more sympathetic for her company. The turmoil of feelings from which he was suffering subsided somewhat.

"Don't you think your mother may have been misunderstood; misunderstood as you are misunderstanding Jenny? Perhaps you and your house owe something to women for what she suffered."

This speech should have sounded curious to Alaric, but he was again thinking of Jenny.

"My mother left me——"

"You don't forgive her?"

"I never thought of that. I only wanted her to come back."

"You wanted your mother?"

"Of course." Alaric looked at her in surprise. "Every boy wants his mother." He wondered that she should have asked him such a question, that she should apparently have been cross-examining him with a view to eliciting this answer.

"Then you can believe that your mother was misunderstood?"

For a moment Alaric forgot Jenny. His face glowed as he thought of his mother, for whom he had yearned so intensely during his sick

childhood. Other children might have been content to do without a relationship which they had never known, but Alaric was too imaginative, and the countless use of the word "mother," spoken and written, around him filled him with a longing to know what the mother was like of whom no one ever spoke, about whose early disappearance from his life there was so much mystery.

"Misunderstood—that wouldn't matter, would it?"

She knew what he meant, although the phrase was a little ambiguous. She was sure now that his mind had never been turned against her, and for this she was thankful to Miss Burne.

"You would trust her, then? You would trust her when you would not trust Jenny?"

"That is different."

She wondered if he would think it different if he should find that his mother was so closely connected with the whole story.

"Have you ever wondered how it is I come to be with Jenny? It must have struck you, surely, during the days since we left Seaborough. For if you believe the worst of Jenny you must think me a very despicable woman to look on at such a thing."

Alaric hesitated, and then answered frankly:

"Yes, I have wondered, but somehow I never thought ill of you for it."

"I want you to imagine, Sir Alaric, a woman who, because of one mistake of which she repented as soon as she had made it, lost everything; a woman who for years had hidden herself away, had sunk into deeper and deeper poverty, and

who, in her wretchedness and loneliness, would soon have sought forgetfulness in death. To this woman God sent the love of a child to remind her of the child she had lost. It was a love which saved her, which gave her something to live for—which set her again amid happy surroundings, surroundings which seem strange and suspicious to conventional ideas—but——”

He saw whither she was leading him and he interrupted her.

“Jenny might be all this and yet——”

“I once had a son,” went on Emma quickly. “He would be just your age, but if I knew he had chosen Jenny for his wife I should be glad, as only a mother can be glad when she knows her son has found a good woman who will make him happy, a woman who is worthy of the best kind of love.”

Alaric grew a little cold. The conversation was back on Jenny and he remembered his wrongs.

“This does not affect me.”

“You must not say that, you know it is not true. Oh, I am a woman who has suffered, who has drunk deep of the cup of humiliation, but I am not the woman to be at Glamoy's Lodge if what you suspect were true.”

Suddenly the strange tone of the conversation seemed to strike Alaric, the personal note of Emma's questions and replies, the biographical nature of the results. He realized that since he had entered the room he had grown nearer to this woman, that she had suddenly become vibratory in relation to him—that a haze of temperament common to them both, and in which they sat together as in a roseate cloud, enveloped their spirits, that sub-

harmonies animated the interview. His voice was not aggressive, it was even yielding and gentle as he asked :

“ Why do you tell me all this ? ”

“ Because I feel a terrible mistake is about to be made.”

“ Then why do you tell me when it is too late ? ” asked Alaric in deep dejection.

Emma paused. The step she had taken should have been taken long before. She was aware of this.

“ Because it was difficult to know how to act and yet be loyal to all. The Duke has been very good to me.”

A bitter expression passed over Alaric's mouth.

“ If what you say is true, Jenny owes everything to him. There is no chance of anyone else doing anything for her.”

Emma could almost have smiled at the naïve admission of jealousy.

“ I don't think Jenny is absolutely provided with every possible thing, mental or material,” she said. “ It is true that she owes him too much to do him injustice. Besides, it is her obvious unhappiness which has made me come here. She is unhappy because she thinks she has gone too far to retreat. Is it too late ? ”

“ If I could only believe what you say about her ! ”

“ What will make you believe it ? ”

She paused, her bosom heaving. A great trembling had overtaken her whole body. Her teeth chattered. She knew that the hour had come. All the considerations enjoining silence

which had seemed of such force lost their power over her. This was her son, bone of her bone and flesh of her flesh. Her great wrong cried out. She would no longer punish herself. The long suffering must end. There was something within her which was beyond reason, which would not be denied. The fact that he was not likely to believe anyone but his own mother on such a subject was potent, the desire to be in his vision as his mother was more potent still. Perhaps in putting the need of Jenny first in her own mind she was not strictly honest—who could have been under such circumstances? Who is, when the primary emotions conflict with what is estimated as justice?

“Would the word of one to whom your happiness is more than anything in the world—perhaps even more than her own—convince you?”

“What do you mean?” Alaric spoke slowly with an altered voice. His feeling of bewilderment had grown.

“If there were such a one, would you believe her?”

“I should have to.”

“Then I assure you of it.”

Alaric paused to realize the true meaning of her words. At first, in a confused way, he took the almost comic view that this woman, who had remained in the background whilst he was at Seaborough and had always been so silent, had taken some curious fancy to him.

He answered almost stupidly:

“You?”

“Yes.”

The absurdity of his first impression disappeared

as he looked at the woman before him and realized the intense emotion under which she was labouring, the obvious breed of her, which had never impressed him so much as at this moment. He hardly knew his own voice as he put the question: "Who are you?" half knowing what the answer would be before it came.

"Your mother, Alaric, your mother." The words struggled out like living things in pain.

"My mother—mother?"

"Alaric, I lost you when you were a little boy—I wronged you. I don't ask you to forgive me—I only ask you——"

But Alaric had risen. He was not listening to what she was saying otherwise than to know that her voice was new music in his life. The moment was too wonderful for any reserve of language. It was a moment when people are classic because ridicule is out of the question.

"I have found my mother—oh!"

The intonation was almost that of a child.

He touched her reverently, afraid that she would vanish—wondering if it were a dream and that she would disappear.

"Alaric, my son!"

She folded him in her arms and there was a long silence. There was balm in that embrace for what he was suffering for Jenny, for her breast was full of a mother's passion.

"Won't you believe me now?"

She wanted to talk of themselves, but she was fearful lest he should imagine that in this matter she had been thinking of herself, and not of him and of Jenny.

The reversion to the subject eased the strain. He said gently :

“ Yes, mother, I believe you, but it is too late.”

“ I am not sure of that, Alaric, and I am convinced that in this matter the Duke was thinking only of Jenny.”

“ You think I have been very unjust to him ? ”

“ Very, Alaric,” she said simply.

“ Does Jenny know that I am your son ? ”

“ No ; I ought not to have spoken, but I could not help it.”

Then a new light dawned on him.

“ But Aunt Isabel—she saw you that evening at Seaborough—she must have known.”

“ She recognized me. She did know.”

“ And she never told me ! ”

“ She was right.”

“ No, it is never right to keep a mother from her son.”

“ She did not do that, Alaric—it was I who stayed away. When I left you I did not know what I was doing. I was mad. I don't want to speak against your father, but I had been humiliated and rendered unhappy till I could bear no more.”

“ Mother, don't. I can't bear it. I love you. I only want your love. I have seen you with Jenny, and no one can turn me against you after that.”

“ Tell me that I was right to come to you.”

“ Of course, mother—but it is too late.”

“ I know I ought to have told you sooner, but it was only when I saw how really wretched Jenny was that I felt you must know. Do you

remember that picture of yourself which you gave her? I found her crying over it as if her heart would break."

They sat for a long time together and talked of Jenny and themselves, and very gently and tactfully Emma put the Duke right in Alaric's eyes.

Alaric was perhaps too inexperienced to think of the possibilities of Emma's life since she had left him. She represented to him a beautiful abstraction, a sentiment which it would be sacrilege to inquire into too closely. From Miss Burne's point of view a future such as he was visualizing would have seemed monstrous—life with a mother who was a social outcast, and a wife who was a woman of the lighter stage.

He drove her to Kingston, and as he left her at the corner of the lane she said:

"Jenny rides in Richmond Park every morning, and reaches the Kingston gate about half-past eight."

CHAPTER XXVI

MAY the comparative peace of Richmond Park never be destroyed. Amazing it is that so far no railway has burrowed a way to its gates to disgorge the city crowds over its fair expanse of lawn and bracken and woodland. It is a blessing to those that love her that she is so little known to the crowd.

On a fine morning in early autumn she is at her best. The air is cool and the sun is warm, and the foliage is turning to a thousand brown, yellow and purple splendours. On the brow of the hill which looks towards Hampton one may gaze down on a glory of autumn colouring, the fires of the year's splendour dying down in a lurid glow.

Here every morning Jenny rode alone, a wondrously picturesque figure. She had the courage to wear a Spanish hat with a plume at a time when the tall hat or billy-cock were fashionable. She rode rather a big, powerful horse for so light a person, but she had a genius for horsemanship, and revelled in the sensation of controlling a force so much mightier than her own.

Her powers of repression had been tested to the utmost during the last week or two, and these morning rides had been a great safety-valve. She had not for a moment conceived it possible that she should change her mind. She must bear with her unhappiness. The only thing to do, having entered upon this amazing adventure, was to carry it through with a great manner. Unless her carriage were fine and dignified she would provoke jeers, and must be at the mercy of the mob. Now and then, however, she shivered as she realized how the bare fact must impress the world.

Her wedding was to take place at the Kingston parish church. There would be Cynthia, a friend of the Duke's, and Emma. The date had been kept absolutely secret. No one but the four concerned knew of it.

Riding into the Park and turning off on to the long stretch where she usually took her first canter, a horseman came up behind and drew level with her. Turning in surprise at the familiarity of the act, she found Alaric's white face looking at her with a haggard appeal that at least she would listen to him.

She was not helpful on such occasions. It was not of her temperament to be so. She had a habit when she was in conflict of fixing her wide-open eyes on her opponent with an alert defensiveness which was disconcerting.

The Park was singularly empty, and although it was not actually raining, to the south-west the horizon was dull and depressed.

All Alaric could say was "Jenny!" but he spoke the word with such profound surrender that

Jenny was startled out of the attitude to which she had schooled herself.

Her heart, which had leapt up when she found him by her side, was again at his feet as she saw the wan misery in his face and heard the broken music of his voice.

There was no need to go over old ground. She understood his mood so perfectly that she said at once :

“ It is too late, Alaric—too late.”

“ It can’t be too late till the thing is done.”

“ It was too late when my word was given.”

“ You are going to ruin our lives for a word spoken ? ”

“ We must accept things in the way in which they have worked out. That is what everyone has to do sooner or later.”

“ I want you to forgive me for what I said to you the other day.”

“ It was natural for you to say it. I had deserved it.”

This was where he felt it was difficult to deal with Jenny. She saw things too clearly as they were. If he could have led her mind into confusion he might have persuaded her to do something illogical, inconsistent, impulsive. She was so different from himself that he could hardly appreciate her attitude. Love is impatient of such restraints, and it somehow feels that it is being dealt with unfairly if it is called upon to consider outside obligations.

He could only reply a little feebly :

“ Don’t send me away, Jenny.”

" I must."

" Let me go to him ? "

She turned on him with a startling amount of decision.

" No, that is impossible. You must never do that. He must never know."

" He has had everything in his life."

" He would be very lonely but for me."

Alaric grew restive under this consideration for the Duke. He had almost lashed out again, but he restrained himself. He was at a loss how to persuade, and he could not subdue himself to accepting the situation.

He argued desperately, and she could not deny herself the joy of hearing him talk and having him with her for a little.

Nothing he could say, however, could make the least impression on her in the way of shaking her determination to abide by her word. Yet she told him something which seemed to make him almost submissive to the fact.

" Alaric, there is something I want to tell you. Other people besides you had insulted me, and the world believed the worst of me. He offered to make me his wife"—she hesitated for a second, but went on bravely—"in name only—he didn't ask anything but that. He told me it would make the rest of his life very happy—and now there is something more—he is ill—he doesn't think that I notice it, but I can't break my word. He is not like other men. He has the heart of a boy, and I can be something to him."

" But if he knew——"

" That is the point. He mustn't know. It would

be cowardly to let him know, and I don't think I ought to be here talking to you."

Then she gave way, and the tears rained down her cheeks. Alaric came close to her and laid his hand on hers.

"Don't cry, Jenny, it's all my fault."

But he had to leave her without the answer he wanted.

Their good-bye was quiet, like a calm after a storm. Perhaps Alaric had at the back of his mind an idea which he might have felt to be unworthy had he allowed it to take shape. The Duke was ill. Fate might play into his hands yet. He had not spoken of Mrs. Goodchild, and Jenny was obviously ignorant of her visit to town. There had been a new interest in Jenny, looked at from the point of view of one who was to a certain extent his mother's work.

"Good-bye, Jenny, you won't forget me?"

Her lip trembled as she murmured "Alaric" and, turning her horse's head towards home, rode slowly away.

Alaric watched her till she was out of sight. There was nothing to be done but to accept the inevitable, and he rode towards the Roehampton Gate on his way back to London.

CHAPTER XXVII

EMMA saw Alaric later in the day, and heard from him the result of the interview from which she had hoped so much. And yet, had she expected much? She was obliged to confess that she had been hoping against hope. She had received a letter from Miss Burne, who remained lonely and helpless, afraid to move in the matter lest she should precipitate the catastrophe. She wrote to ask Emma as a favour to let her know how things were going, and if she had seen Alaric—not that he had left her entirely without news. He wrote to her whilst he was away, as if he were merely on a visit to town, as if events tremendous for himself were not happening. Emma replied to Miss Burne that Jenny was to marry the Duke, and telling her that she had revealed herself to her son.

“For which you will no doubt blame me. I did not intend to do it. On the other hand, sooner or later, with his temperament, he must have felt unhappy at not knowing what had become of me. It is better he should have heard from me that I was in existence. You need not fear—I have a plan

which will enable him to see me and for me to be in his life without being on his social horizon. Father Hawthorne, the vicar of St. Aloysius in Westminster, wants me to take charge of a home for destitute young women which a benefactress of his parish has founded. The work will be what I need, and I shall always be there for Alaric if he wants me. People need never know that I have reappeared, so all will be well. I do not deny that I would wish Miss Oldcastle had been his wife. He could not have chosen a better, strange as this may appear to you. She will astonish those who think it is merely an old man in his second childhood gratifying the vulgar ambition of a girl of the theatre."

In saying this Emma wrote more than she intended, but always the desire to place Jenny before people as she really was made her—usually so silent—even garrulous.

Miss Burne derived from this letter the greatest consolation. If Alaric's mother would only keep out of the way; and if Jenny married the Duke, all would be well. It was perhaps, fortunate, as Emma said, that he should have met his mother. She was quite sure Emma would do as she undertook and make things, as far as she herself was concerned, easy for Alaric. Indeed, a woman who had kept silent for so many years, when her settlements were lying at her disposal, must be a person of extraordinary determination.

In the meantime, with perhaps a last, lingering hope that in some indirect way it might help, Emma had told Jenny the truth about herself and Alaric.

This much it accomplished: it enabled them to talk freely of him.

"That is why you kept away from us at Seaborough, and I remember now how you looked at him when he gave us his name. How strange it must have been."

"It was—strange and terrible."

Jenny laid her cheek against Emma's. "Poor Emma, how you must have suffered!"

"I wish it could have been, Jenny."

"You would wish me to be Alaric's wife?"

"Of course."

This was the greatest compliment any woman could have paid her. It compensated her for much.

"It is too late."

These were the words which Alaric had reiterated.

"Are you sure?"

The argument was opened, but all that Emma could urge or devise was of no avail. She was far too tactful to suggest that she should go to the Duke. She had to admit that from Jenny's point of view there was every argument. With her origin she was extraordinarily sensitive about doing anything unworthy.

Emma dared not even suggest that perhaps the Duke himself would be a little relieved, though the thought was certainly in her mind.

One last effort she made, but it was of no avail. She called on Cynthia in Berkeley Square.

"I think perhaps you are right," answered Cynthia to her statement of the case, "but neither is a personality I should care to interfere with.

I shall, of course, respect your confidence, but although I will not directly push things on, I will not interfere. I would not offend the Duke for anything in the world. Besides, I have given my word." She wondered how Jenny's chaperon came to be a woman of such sound social instinct, and also wondered that she should be so earnest in trying to prevent her charge from being made a duchess. Emma resigned herself to the inevitable, and loyally set herself to make Jenny's preparations as complete as possible. Alaric remained in London, and it was some consolation to him to see his mother and to talk to her about Jenny.

Once he saw the Duke as he stood for a moment at the corner of a turning in Piccadilly, waiting to cross. The picture left on his memory was that of a pair of black horses with a superb action going quickly past, a quiet-looking brougham, and inside the tired figure of an old man. Weary as the attitude was, even in the glance caught by Alaric he noticed the fine carriage of the head and a certain remaining splendour of glance from beneath Olympian brows.

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE morning of the—to Alaric—fatal day came, grey and melancholy. Perhaps all those concerned looked out on it with a sense of unreality, with the weird feeling of being puppets in some mime-drama.

The Duke reeled as he stepped out of bed. His man just managed to catch him and to lay him gently back. In a few minutes he was better.

“Don’t mention this, Brett.”

He dressed with a curious sensation of numbness growing upon him, while the greyness in his face deepened. Somehow he felt that whatever else happened he would be given strength to carry through his purpose. Still, he would omit no precaution.

“Brett, take the carriage and go for Sir Benjamin. Bring him back with you.”

The man, who had been dressing the Duke with increasing anxiety, knew his master too well to make any suggestion of his going back to bed. He left the room without more than “Yes, your Grace.”

Till Sir Benjamin arrived the Duke sat with closed eyes.

"I am ill, very ill, Blackwood, but you must make me last out the morning."

Sir Benjamin knew what he meant.

"You ought to be in bed, Duke."

"None of that, please. Oblige me."

The physician saw what was required of him, and knowing that the cord was frayed to snapping, set himself to make it hold the required time.

When the Duke called for Cynthia, beyond a curious aroma of drugs in the carriage she noticed nothing; neither did she notice Sir Benjamin's carriage, which set out to follow as soon as they started away from the house. It had stood waiting at the corner of the square. The valet, without being told, put himself into a hansom and followed the doctor's carriage. So far as possible he kept his keen white face on the brougham containing the Duke and Cynthia. They drove through Mortlake, which was wrapped in a ghostly shroud of mist, and passed through the Park, an unusual sight.

It was barely half-past eight when they drew up at the church at Kingston. The Duke had talked almost gaily.

"I want you to go into the church and meet Jenny, Cynthia."

The moment Cynthia had passed from the vestry into the church Sir Benjamin entered.

"You have done me splendidly so far."

The physician's face was terribly serious as he pulled up the Duke's sleeve and drew a small needle from a case.

"Don't look so serious, man, a Glamoy's doesn't fail on such an occasion as this. Especially under the circumstances. I said I'd see them damned, and I will."

The verger came to tell him the bride was at the west door, and he passed into the church, wearing for the last time the splendour of bearing and the glamour of personality which had always been his.

Besides, he had wished this thing. Let them think what they would of her afterwards.

Yet somehow Jenny guessed. She shrank a little as he came to her side, but to go on was the wisest thing she could do. To have made a scene must have precipitated a catastrophe.

Emma and Cynthia and Colonel Coveney, the Duke's friend, signed the register. They passed out of the church under a silent organ.

She had lived through it as in a dream. In another minute they were driving back to Glamoy's Lodge.

"A grey morning for a wedding, little girl," said the Duke in a voice which struck a chill into her.

"Daddy!" she pressed his hand, grown very cold, between her own, and then put it to her warm, young breast.

"Why, Jenny, how your heart beats!"

At the house he sank into a deep chair.

"I've kept faith with you, little girl."

She poured out some wine and gave it to him.

"The Duchess of Glamoy's," he said in a hollow voice, raising the glass with trembling hands to his lips. It fell and broke.

Later in the day it was known in London what had happened:

The Duke had not died till the afternoon, and he had died with Jenny's head on his breast. A few minutes before he had murmured some disjointed pieces of verse, but the words were not very audible. Jenny understood them, and remembered that he had quoted them the day he had asked her to be his wife.

There are loves not understood by the world, and the Duke died loved by Jenny for all that Alaric was her lover, and that time held them in bondage for each other.

THE END

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